In Search of a Future

The Story of Kashmir

DAVID DEVADAS

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Timeline

1925:	Hari Singh ascends the Jammu & Kashmir throne

1931 to 1946: Coalescing of identity

1931:	Violent eruption by Kashmiri Muslims
1932:	Muslim Conference formed
1939:	Muslim Conference converts itself into National Conference
1940:	National Conference splits; Muslim Conference re-forms separately
1941:	Jamaat-e-Islami, a movement to regenerate Islam, established by Abul A'la Maududi
1945:	National Conference adopts Marxian *Naya Kashmir* manifesto; first Kashmiris get in touch with Jamaat-e-Islami
1946:	Sheikh Abdullah launches Quit Kashmir agitation against maharaja

1946 to 1952: Political uncertainty

August 1947:	India and Pakistan come into being
October–November 1947:	Pathan tribesmen invade state; Hari Singh accedes conditionally to India; Indian Army arrives to defend the valley; Abdullah takes over as chief emergency administrator
1948:	British get Nehru to take issue to the United Nations; Abdullah becomes prime minister of state; UN Security Council passes resolution for plebiscite
1949:	Ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan; line dividing the state created; Article 370 added to Indian constitution
1950:	United Nations representative for Kashmir appointed; Dixon Plan proposed, rejected by India and Pakistan
1951:	Constituent assembly formed; Abdullah deposes Hari Singh
1952:	India gives the state autonomy just short of independence; Abdullah covertly seeks US backing for independence

1953 to 1982: Beginnings of insurgency against India

1953:	Abdullah arrested; G.M. Bakshi becomes prime minister of Kashmir
1955:	Plebiscite Front formed by Mirza Aslam Beg; adopts 'right to self-determination' demand
1957:	National Conference splits for a few months; Democratic National Conference, led by Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq, formed
1958:	Abdullah released, re-arrested after a few months
1963:	Bakshi pushed to resign under Congress' Kamaraj Plan; relic goes missing from Hazratbal shrine
1964:	Relic restored, G.M. Sadiq takes over as chief minister, cedes many of the state's special powers; released from jail again, Abdullah takes plan for joint management of valley and surroundings to Pakistan with Nehru's knowledge; Nehru dies; Abdullah re-arrested after a few months
1965:	Indo-Pakistan war; Jammu and Kashmir National Liberation Front, precursor to the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), formed in Muzaffarabad
1967:	Communal riots
1968:	Al Fatah, Kashmir's first guerrilla force, born
1971:	Second Indo-Pakistan war; Bangladesh is born
1972:	Simla Agreement; ceasefire line henceforth called the Line of Control
1975:	Abdullah returns to office, backed by the Congress
1977:	Abdullah wins elections
1982:	Abdullah dies; his son Farooq succeeds him as chief minister and leader of the National Conference

1983 to 1992: Insurgency heightens

1983:	Communally polarized elections pit Congress against National Conference
1984:	Maqbool Butt hanged in Delhi; Jagmohan appointed governor; coup engineered against Farooq
1987:	Assembly elections rigged; Farooq Abdullah returns to power in alliance with Congress; new political group, Muslim United Front, defeated; Pakistan makes deal with JKLF to train and arm insurgents
February–March 1988:	Pakistan-sponsored training of militants begins
July 1988:	First blasts
August 1988:	Zia-ul Haq dies; pro-Pakistan militant groups begin to take shape, led mainly by Ahle-hadis and Jamaat-e-Islami activists

July 1989:	General K.V. Krishna Rao replaces Jagmohan as governor
August 1989:	Formation of Hizbullah announced
October–November 1989:	Rivals of JKLF begin to get arms and training—Hizb-ul Mujahideen (Hizb), Muslim Janbaz Force, Al Umar and Students' Liberation Force most important
December 1989:	Rubaiya Sayeed, home minister's daughter, abducted; five prisoners released in exchange
January–February 1990:	Farooq Abdullah resigns; Jagmohan reappointed governor; Gowkadal massacre; Pakistan leadership decides to back Hizb-ul Mujahideen through Jamaat-e-Islami instead of pro-independence JKLF
March 1990:	Jamaat-e-Islami leader Ali Shah Geelani begins to take control of Hizb-ul Mujahideen; JKLF commander-in-chief Ishfaq Majid killed
May 1990:	Mirwaiz Farooq assassinated; Jagmohan sacked; Governor G.C. Saxena begins to combat insurgency effectively through intelligence
February–August 1990:	Kashmiri Pandits killed by JKLF activists with gruesome cruelty; Pandits flee the valley as refugees
August 1990:	Yasin Malik and other senior JKLF commanders captured
1991–93:	Hizb-ul Mujahideen rules rural Kashmir, decimates other militant groups; Jamaat activists impose versions of Shariat in pockets
December 1992:	ISI allows Pakistan-based Harkat-ul Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Tayyaba to operate in Kashmir but Hizb-ul Mujahideen retains primacy

1993 to 2007: Political agendas of militant groups; jihadi extremism; excesses by army; inconclusive talks for a peaceful settlement

March 1993:	Krishna Rao replaces Saxena as governor; army presence increases dramatically; announcement to form Hurriyat Conference
September 1993:	All Parties Hurriyat Conference formed
1994:	Yasin Malik released, announces JKLF ceasefire; Shabir Shah released, talks of including Pandits, Jammu and Ladakh
1996:	Assembly elections held; Farooq Abdullah returns to power
1998:	G.C. Saxena replaces Krishna Rao as governor
February 1999:	Vajpayee visits Lahore
May–October 1999:	Kargil war; General Musharraf takes power in Pakistan
December 1999:	Kandahar hijacking; three leading militants released

2000:	Clinton visits India; Hurriyat ginger group led by Abdul Ghani Lone tries for talks amid ceasefire by both sides; Geelani prevents peace moves
July 2001:	Agra Summit between Vajpayee and Musharraf
September 2001:	World Trade Center attacked
October 2001:	Militants storm J&K assembly; Jaish-e-Mohammed claims responsibility
December 2001:	Militants storm Indian Parliament; Indian and Pakistani armies brace for war
May 2002:	Abdul Ghani Lone assassinated
October 2002:	Assembly elections; Mufti Mohammed Sayeed becomes chief minister
2003:	India offers confidence building measures; Hurriyat splits
January 2004:	Pakistan agrees to Vajpayee's proposal to make borders irrelevant; switches backing from Geelani to mirwaiz-led Hurriyat
Summer 2006:	Infiltration increases
January 2007:	Hopes for peace through self-rule get fillip with Hurriyat visit to Pakistan but lose momentum

Major Militant Groups

Group	*Main commanders*	*Political leaders*	*Ideology*
Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF)	Ahad Waza, Ishfaq Majid, Yasin Malik, Javed Mir	Maqbool Butt, Amanullah Khan, Dr Guru	Freedom
Students' Liberation Front (later Ikhwan-ul Muslimeen)	Hilal Beg	Abbas Ansari (figurehead of advisory council)	Independence, but amenable to ISI
Hizb-ul Mujahideen (Hizb)	Yusuf Shah a.k.a. Syed Salahuddin, Majid Dar	ISI since 1990, Ali Shah Geelani	Jamaat-e-Islami's political Islam, Pro-Pakistan
Muslim Janbaz Force	Syed Firdous a.k.a. Babar Badr	Shabir Shah (inspiration)	Pro-Pakistan
Al Umar	Mushtaq Zargar	Mirwaiz loyalists but not backed by him	Pro-Pakistan
Hizbullah	Mushtaq Butt a.k.a. Guga sahib		Pan-Islamist
Pakistan-based groups: Harkat-ul Mujahideen (emerged from madrasas associated with Tablighi Jamaat and Taliban)	Farooq		Islamist jihad (Deobandi)
Jaish-e-Mohammed (Harkat offshoot)	Masood Azhar	ISI, Masood Azhar	
Lashkar-e-Tayyaba	Various	Hafiz Mohammed Saeed	Jihad (Deoband and Wahhabi influence)

Preface

In 1998, when I first decided to write a book on Kashmir, I thought I was a Kashmir expert but realized as research for this book progressed how little I knew. I began with no hypothesis; my research was open-ended. I gathered facts, mainly through interviews, checked and cross-checked them with the techniques I had learnt as a reporter and analysed those facts to present a cogent understanding of an immensely complex and multifaceted situation. *In Search of a Future* is based largely on oral accounts; it is an attempt to piece together afresh what has actually happened among a people that have been mired in propaganda and myth. It focuses primarily on the Kashmiri militancy that erupted in 1989 but, to give perspective, begins in 1931.

Every bit of the book is fact, based on detailed research conducted over the past nine years, although I have used the narrative style of fiction to convey the story. To do that, I have been forced to omit much of the material I gathered. Even after culling my research on various militant outfits to name only half a dozen, I have had to ignore or barely mention such major events as the Tsrar-e-Sharief fire, the Hazratbal siege, the police strike and the attack at the police headquarters, since they were tangential to the broad flow of Kashmir's political, social, economic and cultural history in the period covered here, 1931 to 2007. A history as complex as the one I have attempted to write, cannot be encapsulated; I hope the timeline and the brief sketches of the various militant outfits and important players will help as a quick reference to aid understanding.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir comprises the plains of the Jammu region, the valley of Kashmir and the region of Ladakh. When I write of Kashmir, I allude to what is known commonly as the valley—Kashmir Valley—that lies on the Indian side of the Line of

Control. In speaking of Kashmiris, I refer to the valley's dominant ethnic community—both Muslim and Pandit.

I am not sanguine about the ability of India and Pakistan to find a lasting solution to their dispute over Kashmir, for it goes to the heart of their respective notions of nationhood. I do believe, on the other hand, that the India–Pakistan problem can only be resolved if Kashmir heals itself. That healing must be internal; if Kashmir can pull together harmoniously, it can become the bedrock of harmony across South Asia. Indeed, it could become an example for the world. However, the harmony within Kashmir that I dream of is not possible without moral courage. It involves accommodation of others' aspirations and that is only possible through non-attachment and discipline—the keys to the precepts of most religions. Kashmir, amid the relative prosperity that land reforms unleashed over the past two generations, has come a long, long way away from those principles; selfish aspirations have run amok. What is truly frightening is that India and Pakistan are catching up with that greedy scramble. I hope Kashmir will turn the corner before the subcontinent descends into violent strife—so that it might lead the rest of South Asia back to a moral anchor. Perhaps the first step in healing is for Kashmiris to accept the current reality, the crisis not only of leadership but of character. I have pulled no punches in laying out that reality starkly. I know that much of what I have written will upset several sections in Kashmir and beyond, for this book does not stick to accepted myths.

'My people need to be healed,' the Master told me, but not how to heal. Perhaps this book might at least serve as a pointer towards a diagnosis.

Kashmir
July 2007

David Devadas

{1}

Paradise Stressed

Kashmir is a gently terraced, oval valley of green and gold and crystal streams, so beautiful that it has often been called paradise. To the immediate north-east is the Great Himalayan Range and to the south-west, the Pir Panjal. Beyond the Pir Panjal stretch lower ridges to Poonch, Mirpur and Jammu, near the edges of the plains. An icy pass, Zoji La, leads to other worlds further to the north-east: Kargil, Ladakh, Siachen—the 'highest battlefield in the world'—and the routes to China and Central Asia beyond.

So much more fecund is the Kashmir Valley than its rocky or ice-bound neighbours that it is vastly more populous. To a bird's eye, its fecundity is picturesque: hamlets nestle amid fields and streams and woods that are an annual symphony of colour. Green paddy sprouts on brown terraces before turning gold. Grey snow-melt tumbles down rivers before those turn a quieter crystal. Bare apple and almond trees turn green, as does the chinar, which then turns red, maroon and yellow until snow drapes them all. Close up though, the picturesque hamlets are untidy bunches of double-storey bare-brick or concrete houses with tin roofs. Electrical wires hang loose between timber pylons; apple-cheeked boys play in canals lined with pink and blue plastic bags—trappings of wealth bereft of an aesthetic.

The scene may startle, even distress, but should not surprise. For, though Kashmir's rural stretches are some of the wealthiest in the Indian subcontinent, it is new money, tainted money, stressful money. To be sure, it is a welcome change from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—then the beauty of the place served only to highlight its impoverishment. Poverty, however, is only a superficial aspect of Kashmir's story; its unhappiness runs deeper. Whether it has been rich or poor, contentment has always eluded the valley. Its history is

a vile saga: more than one widowed queen killed little sons or grandsons to take the throne and several lovers, a king burnt a city for a night's entertainment, another starved his brothers to death, ministers wrenched gold coins off the vestments of a king writhing on his deathbed...

In short, Kashmir has, for the most part, not had nurturing leaders. The last Kashmiri king, Sahadev, fled in 1320 to his father-in-law's neighbouring kingdom leaving his people to face one of the fiercest assaults of all time—by the Mongol, Dulchu Khan, who left behind utter devastation.

Two mercenaries from beyond the mountains stepped into the vacuum left in the wake of the Mongol's raids—first, Rinchin from Ladakh and then Shah Mirza from Swat. The latter left a dynasty that lasted two centuries until the Chaks, Shia Dards from just beyond Kashmir, took over. They so alienated the resident Sunni majority that a plea for succour went to Mughal Emperor Akbar from Kashmir's revered pirs: Sheikh Hamza Makhdoom sahib, Baba Dawood Khaki, Yakub Sarfi and Mir Baba Haider.

Akbar defeated the Chaks to annex Kashmir into the Mughal Empire in 1586. He brought order, dispatching Raja Todar Mal to tediously sort out revenue records. Mughal rule was largely benign, but it gradually weakened. The Afghans seized Kashmir in 1756, Sikhs took over in 1819, and the British installed the Dogra dynasty in 1846.

Of course, these names and dates represent only the shell of Kashmir's story. The meat is in its social and cultural history, the ways in which its religions and values have developed, and its economic patterns. Kashmiri society is extraordinarily complex, and these internal dynamics shaped its responses when it was buffeted after 1930 by influences of every sort—ideological, doctrinal, geopolitical and economic.

The complexities of Kashmiri society have evolved over six centuries of kaleidoscopic change. In 1320, Dulchu Khan decimated a Brahmin-dominated society that had, over centuries, nurtured an intricate hierarchy within. So conscious were they of ethnic supremacy that Kashmir's Hindus came to collectively call themselves Pandit, meaning scholar-priest.

That supremacist notion proved to be their undoing. Rinchin, the Ladakhi adventurer who stepped into the rubble Dulchu Khan had left, had no idea that the Mahayana Buddhism he had grown up with in Ladakh had been born in Kashmir—so thoroughly had it since been crushed by the Pandits. Rinchin decided to adopt one of the two religions that his new subjects practised. Leading Pandits informed him that he could become a Hindu only if he was reborn into its stratified ethnic hierarchy. So, after a restless night, chancing upon Bulbul Shah, an ascetic from Central Asia who was then preaching Islam in the valley, Rinchin adopted the religion.

Fortuitously then Islam took over the court in the 1320s. Half-a-century later, it had reached out to the majority in Kashmir. When Syed Mir Ali led 700 acolytes out of Hamadan in Persia to get beyond the reach of Taimur's merciless sword, he finally stopped in Kashmir. Wrapping fear of the daunting scholars in charm, Kashmiris received him like royalty, hailing him as Shah-e-Hamadan. But in that theologian, the Kashmiri's wit met its match. Astute enough to negotiate a match and a truce between Kashmir's king and the Khilji Sultan of Delhi, Syed Mir Ali established a superior social and economic status for his Central Asian train, who further tightened their grip by compressing the metaphysical spirituality of their Sufi heritage into a fear-filled set of superstitions and exorcisms.

To draw converts, Mir Ali repackaged the plain rituals of Islam to enthral bubbling minds. He composed a string of *aurad-e-faathia* chants: an hour or two of soul-soothing music morning and evening to match the comforting cadence of Hindu shlokas. Even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when fundamentalism seeks to stifle such culturally contextual practices, aurad rhythms resound across the waters of the Dal lake after the first prayers every morning, as if reaching out to receive the sunrays streaming over the Zabarwan range.

Many non-Brahmins and some lesser Brahmins converted to Mir Ali's syncretistic Islam. The ritualistic emotionalism even infected the religiosity of the Pandits (the Mongol had left their richly intellectual heritage in shreds and shards). Many converted to escape contempt but remained stuck in the quagmire of caste even centuries later. More so than most other regions which converted to Islam or Christianity across the Indian subcontinent, caste consciousness is unremitting

in Kashmir's syncretistic milieu. Even in the twenty-first century, a young Muslim clad in low-slung jeans and sneakers could be heard whispering as he lounged around a snooker table in uptown Srinagar, the state capital, that one of the other players, also a Muslim, was a *nanvai*, a baker. That term referred of course only to the player's caste origin, for the equally fashionable young man might be a graduate in computer applications who had never seen the inside of a bakery. Whatever one's accomplishments, only a claim of Brahmin ancestry seems to satisfy Kashmir—unless it is Syed ancestry.

A new kind of Muslim elite had arrived in Kashmir beginning with Mir Ali's train. They called themselves Syed, indicating descent from the Prophet of Islam. Their surnames—Naqshbandi, Andrabi, Geelani, Drabu and so on—vaunted their pride at being expatriates from places in Persia and Central Asia. For half a millennium, they comprised the majority of Kashmir's pirs, and many were landlords. So intense was the competition between Syed and non-Syed Muslim elites that between 1484 and 1517, Sultan Mohammed Shah and Sultan Fath Shah changed places six times, depending on whether Syeds or non-Syeds dominated.

Syeds are not the only ones who claimed superiority. The Shia elite that had ruled the roost when the Chaks reigned in the sixteenth century were destroyed in a backlash but new feudal masters emerged among Kashmir's Shias in the nineteenth century, ones that the non-Muslim rulers of the time propped up so that they would help to keep the minority group loyal. This new Shia elite competed with the main rival elites, Pandit and Syed, who already vied for wealth and status, exploitation of ordinary Kashmiris giving them the first, contempt for them the second.

All this contempt-mongering caused a great deal of reactive one-upmanship, not just among these oligarchies but across Kashmiri society. Most—Muslim as well as Hindu—Kashmiris began to claim descent from Brahmins, and many Muslims adopted the Syed title. A marital alliance with a Pathan family was much valued too, for that brought the machismo of the Khan surname. Over time, it became a debilitating disease, this desperate need to demonstrate superior stock. Among themselves, each Kashmiri individual and community tried to posture above the rest. Together, the lot felt superior to all non-Kashmiris. 'You must remember if you want to understand

Kashmir, the Kashmiri never forgot "I am a Saraswat Brahmin",' Abdul Ghani Bhat, a former teacher, would say at the turn of the twenty-first century when he chaired an organization called the All Parties Hurriyat Conference.

This one-upmanship bred internecine violence, the selective historical memories of each community of another's violence generating a need to show who was superior through retaliation. Pandits tended to recall the two Muslim rulers who forced conversions, both terribly barbaric periods. Their Muslim neighbours, on the other hand, remembered the persuasive skills of Bulbul Shah and Syed Mir Ali. They focussed instead on how Pandits had, whenever they dominated, shown disdain by tossing food into the outstretched palms of vassals in order not to be polluted.

So, whichever community had the protection of the ruler of the day violated others, as Shia rulers replaced Sunni and vice versa, and non-Muslim replaced Muslim, each time turning the feudal hierarchy topsy-turvy. When Pathan governors let them, Muslims merrily bounced onto the backs of Pandits, riding them like asses. Under Dogras, Pandits kicked Muslims all the way home. When Shias ruled, a Sunni qazi was trampled under an elephant. When Sunnis ruled, the Shias' most revered grave became a burnt dung-heap.

This communal antagonism also fed on impoverishment in the sixteenth century and again since the mid-eighteenth century. In 1534, by the time a civil war between Syeds and non-Syeds had raged for fifty years, one could not get a *kharwar* (80 kg) of paddy for even 10,000 dinars. And after the Mughals lost Kashmir in 1756, the cruel taxes and forced labour that Pathans, Sikhs and Dogras extorted brought ordinary Kashmiris to the edge of starvation. The extortions were enforced with terror. Pathan governor Karimdad Khan's arrival in Kashmir is recounted as a particularly chilling story: passing a funeral procession, Kaker (Karimdad) Khan got off his palanquin, ripped the shroud and cut off the corpse's nose, then told the mourners to go and announce he had arrived. Sikh governors squeezed what little blood the Afghans had left in Kashmir's pauperized peasants and, like the Dogras, referred to Kashmiris as *dangar*, animal, or the pejorative *hato*. The Pathans used to refer to them as *padar sokta* or bastards.

Such abusive colonialism was not unique; Kashmir's response was. It smoothly took all the abuse with a smile. Deftly wrapping purpose

in charm, it schemed advantage behind angelic flattery. Kashmir's cheapened religious practices were not designed to instil discipline, a strong ethical code or an egalitarian order. Each one looked out for self and family, keeping open as many options as possible. Guile was the preferred weapon of a wit sharp enough not only to scheme manipulative responses, but also to avoid physical pain. (The Chak armies that beat back the Mughals several times before the pirs invited Akbar had comprised hardy warriors from the edges of the valley and just beyond.)

Through those terrible periods, Kashmir protected itself with beads and lockets and tearful visits to graves, shrilly accusing fate in a language so distant from those of its conquerors that they never followed. Of course, its superstitious religiosity only perpetuated exploitation. It bolstered the pirs, who were often Syeds. Eager to tap into the influence that their claims of transcendental power gave them, successive regimes appointed pirs as landlords. No wonder then, Kashmir remained stuck for centuries in a cycle of feudal exploitation.

This was no exception. Until the nineteenth century, the world generally comprised innumerable, largely isolated feudal communities, for that was the best the technologies of past times could sustain. Things began to change in the nineteenth century, as economic growth and the dissemination of ideas spurred competitive politics. The logic of wealth dictated politics of sharing for the twentieth century, but acquisitive competition too often directed politics along ethnic, communal or sectarian lines. When Kashmir too began to break out of the cycle of feudal dominance early in the twentieth century, its political alignment was sharply communal, since Muslims felt deprived. That deprivation had been spawned by British rule in two ways. The revenue system established after the British-managed Land Survey and Settlement of the 1890s had created a landless class, since taking over virgin land was no longer an option. Meanwhile the increased monetization that the import of British goods caused—Kashmir had hitherto lived almost entirely by barter—had strengthened the grip of moneylenders. The landless were generally Muslim, moneylenders most often Hindus.

The pirs and other Muslim landlords were already distressed over the fact that under non-Muslim rule Pandits controlled much more land than them. The majority of the landlords in the kingdom, including the valley, were Dogras from the regime's citadel, Jammu,

and the fact that those landlords too were generally Hindus tied into the perception of Hindu/Pandit oppression. The Muslim elite had also begun to focus on the fact that although Pandits had been less than 5 per cent of the valley's population since at least the late eighteenth century, they had never loosened their grip on the job market. Muslim traders too were resentful of their Hindu counterparts. Early in the nineteenth century, European demand for pashmina, or Cashmere, shawls (the Empress Josephine's taste having made Cashmere Paris's fashion staple) had allowed mercantile classes to vie with the feudal ones. But, after the Franco-German war of 1870 squeezed Cashmere's most lucrative remaining market (traditional markets in Mughal and other eighteenth-century north Indian courts having already been demolished by the British), Muslim shawl traders began to acutely resent the Pandits' larger share of shawl loom licences.

Maharaja Hari Singh, who took the Dogra throne in 1925, was liberal compared with his ancestors and so encouraged not only the education but also the employment of Muslims in his government. It was a small beginning, though, and only served to underline the newly aspiring Muslim Kashmiri's awareness of deprivation. Piecemeal benevolence did not sit well at all with the Kashmiri's deep-seated sense both of being superior and of being a victim. Encouraged by British sympathizers, Muslim traders began to assert themselves. A few of them even addressed a complaint against the maharaja to Lord Reading, the viceroy, delivered during his visit in the summer of 1925. The memorandum referred to the striking weavers at the state silk factory trampled the previous year under the hooves of cavalry commanded by the crown prince Hari Singh. Although there had been strikes there in the past, this was the first occasion when the demands included the appointment of Muslim managers.

One of the signatories to this petition was Kashmir's leading Muslim trader—Saduddin Shawl, who derived his surname from the vast numbers of Cashmere shawls his family had traded for as long as anyone could remember. But even though they were among the most respected members of their community, Shawl and another of the signatories were exiled that winter for having written that complaint. Lord Reading had simply marked it to the maharaja.

That was not surprising. As long as revenue and fealty flowed, the British allowed their princelings the illusion of independent power. When Hari Singh's great-grandfather, Gulab Singh, had bought

Kashmir in the process of selling out his feudal master, the Sikh maharaja, to the East India Company, the British had vouchsafed inheritance to his male heirs—so long as they acknowledged British paramountcy each year with an offering of one horse, six male and six female goats of approved breed and three pairs of Cashmere shawls. Those tokens annually paid, the regime and its oligarchies of landlords extracted such hefty revenues that most Kashmiris went hungry for a couple of months before the annual paddy crop. But that did not concern the British.

The failure of their memorandum to Lord Reading did, however, sharpen the consciousness of being victims among Kashmir's Sunni Muslim elite. By the late 1920s, their memoranda and telegrams to the Dogra court spoke more and more pointedly of oppression by Pandits. It was in such an unsettled societal milieu that another new class joined the social climb, its notion of superiority based on a new paradigm of status, one that threatened not just to shake up the current hierarchy but to bring down stratification itself. This was the class of the newly educated Kashmiri.

The maharaja's government, British missionaries and Lahore-based Muslim reformers had, since the late nineteenth century, afforded young Kashmiris modern higher education. Even a few Muslims had begun by the second decade of the twentieth century to graduate, generally at either Aligarh or Lahore. After some initial cultural resistance to a foreign education—one of the first Muslims to learn English was dubbed *Shahb Chire* (Shahb, the Christian) since it was perceived as conversion—it was not difficult to rekindle learning and aspiration in Kashmir's tiny Muslim middle class. Kashmiris had never let the spark of its genius die even six centuries after the decimation of a civilization that had mastered medicine, theology, theatre and architecture. Perhaps its Brahmin traditions accounted for the fact that it was one of the few places in the world with several ancient histories, some written a thousand years ago, that people still read and absorbed. This detailed memory combined with an immense sense of self-worth to spark a quest for resurgent greatness among the educated young men of the Muslim elite. By 1930, Kashmir was simmering, ready to explode.

It was an extraordinary juncture in world history. In most places, isolated feudal agrarian economies had been squeezed over the

previous century and a half by colonial exploiters, but the First World War had weakened Europe's powerful grip and a complex, relatively egalitarian modern societal norm had begun to spread across the globe. Most peoples struggled with it, having hitherto had no more than a tenuous sense of belonging to a larger group identity than a religion, a caste, a village or a tribe. The central challenge of the next half-century would be to fulfil aspirations, to construct new nation states and to figure out social and political systems to make them work cohesively, often without the industrialization, urbanization and intellectual ferment from which these had evolved organically in Europe.

Most European nation states have been founded over the past few centuries on a monocultural template. They had in many cases expelled, converted or killed rival ethnicities, religions and sects by means such as the Inquisition. As peoples elsewhere, newly free of the shackles of European empires, struggled to define their identities in the twentieth century—territorially and in terms of social grouping—ethnic, sectarian and religious antagonisms often grew stronger. Still stuck in primitive agrarian economies, many new nations flailed, too often held together by little more than one or other sort of dictatorship.

Among primitive agrarian societies, Kashmir had been the most strongly convinced of separateness, its ethnic identity having been protected over millennia by its terrain—almost literally a well. So, after 1930, Kashmir has gone through one of the most complex searches for identity, ideology and nationhood of any people anywhere. It has toyed with various, sometimes contradictory, ideological and doctrinal influences as it has stumbled through a radical socio-economic transformation, one that created modern aspirations but not the industrialization that could satisfy them. Some Kashmiris vacillated between a nationalist construct that included various types of Kashmiris and one dominated by the Sunni Muslim majority.

Many of them sought a separate destiny in the modern world but, in doing so, clung to a territorial identity artificially established in the late nineteenth century, oblivious to changed realities and the differing aspirations of the other disparate communities within those borders. Since the ethnic Kashmiri population lived, even within the valley, in the lush central terraces, the struggle for a separate national identity pulsated across an area just 160 kilometres long and about 40 kilometres wide, but also insisted on carrying along with it, even against their

will, regions and peoples from very far away—geographically as well as ethnically, culturally, in history and in aspirations.

As if that conundrum was not enough, Kashmir, and the diverse neighbourhood that it clung to, was buffeted through the latter half of the twentieth century by a struggle for ownership by two powerful nations (India and Pakistan), each founded on contrasting models of nationhood, and by the machinations of major geopolitical powers. These two nations and the other powers were either oblivious to Kashmir's separate aspirations or eager to manipulate them for their own ends.

Quite apart from the machinations of these powers, however, Kashmir's aspirations on the world stage were thwarted by its internal divisions. Its history over the past six centuries ensured that it faced inter-religious violence—and ethnic and sectarian suspicions—more sharply than most. Also, Kashmir's culture and religious mores ensured that it remained, for the most part, a collection of individuals and families, each of them intent on their own goals rather than on collective ones.

Kashmir struggled vigorously to become a modern nation state but failed to develop a viable model. Kashmiris were hobbled by internecine suspicions as well as the culture of guile and intrigue that grew through centuries of colonial oppression. An even greater weakness is that the aspiration remained stuck in a mindset of contemptuous superiority, one that not only kept it divided within but prompted it to look for a future premised on the oppression of others—a colonist's model that was out of sync with an age that offered unprecedented opportunities for living together in mutual accommodation.

PART ONE

1931 to 1982

Eruption

The shrine of Dastagir Sahib in Srinagar juts like a defiant assertion into the middle of the street, but it was in a secluded room of a house behind the shrine that the eruption of 1931 began to build. Palatial for those not used to palaces, it was called *gol kamara,* the Round Room, because of the small dome that rose from four thick plastered pillars to a little chandelier. That space at the centre was for more important men to squat, but the wooden floors beyond were also covered with silk carpets, worn thin. For even the less important men who might be shown to the Round Room were important enough in the intricate social hierarchies of Kashmir. The filigreed screens around the wooden balconies—the *ghulam ghardish* for servants to flit—might have been more magnificent than the papier mâché ceiling if polish had revealed the fine grains of the large walnut planks. But they were painted thickly green, the comforting colour of religiosity.

The youthful keeper of the shrine, Maqbool Geelani, had immense wealth and influence, not only from the landholdings that went with the position he had inherited but also from his marriage into the ranking feudal family of Uri at the edge of Kashmir. The pir title was prefixed to his name but, though he was indeed revered as a seer with mystic powers, he was happiest riding a horse on a duck shoot with Englishmen or lounging on a divan in the evening, nursing a glass of amber liquid that, if anyone asked, he archly described as a medicine his doctor had prescribed.

His remarkable achievement as host of the meeting he had organized in the Round Room in March 1931 was that sitting with him under the little dome were the clerics who controlled the other two major inner city mosques: the mirwaiz of the Jamia mosque, Mohammed Yousuf Shah, and the mirwaiz of the Khanakah mosque.

The word *mirwaiz*, meaning chief priest, was invented for their common ancestor who during the previous century had migrated from working-class roots in Tral, a hamlet in the south-east, and naturally there simmered just beneath the surface of their relations the bitterness of rivalry. So important was this meeting, however, that both had come—to join almost all of Kashmir's Muslim landlords and merchants, a few dozen men.

Several of those who had led Kashmir's sporadic bouts of defiance in the recent past were there. Saduddin Shawl, for instance, back from his exile for complaining to the viceroy against the maharaja. He must have cut an impressive figure, for photographs of the period show a tall, erect, bearded figure wearing a large turban, his hands clasped urbanely over a double-breasted jacket neatly buttoned on both sides over crisply ballooning muslin pajamas and a tight Windsor knot that peeped between curved collars.

The agenda for that meeting had to do with the birth of a son to the maharani. The men there were greatly exercised as a consequence of that birth. Not at the continuation of the dynasty. Not at all. After all, most of those in the Round Room comprised one of the feudal oligarchies that exploited the masses under the aegis of the maharaja. They were gathered there to vent their fury over the fact that the places they had been given in the reception line planned for Kashmir's landlords to congratulate His Highness when he returned from France were not important enough.

The Bhatas are going to dominate again, they murmured darkly. Bhatas—or Dar—is what Muslims called Hindus behind their backs. In front of them, of course, they used the honorific, Pandit. But in the security of the Round Room, several lower lips must surely have curled sneeringly below the sounds of Bhata and Dar as the meeting stretched through the day and into the early hours of the next morning.

The telegram to congratulate His Highness and invite him to tea with all the landlords of Kashmir had been dispatched by a landlord called Bal Kak Dhar; this too had scratched a particularly raw nerve. The Dhars, since Bal Kak's great-grandfather Birbal Dhar, had been the Daroga Shawls, keepers of the seal every shawl was stamped with before export. Fingers had been sliced over unstamped exports.

The post had been Birbal Dhar's reward for creeping undetected to Lahore to beg the Sikh maharaja, Ranjit Singh, to wrest Kashmir

from the Afghans. The Afghans had not only squeezed Kashmir for every penny, Hindus had faced genocide too. One governor, Asad Khan, tossed them into the lake tied in sacks. Wishing to improve on that, his successor Mir Hazar had ordered leather sacks.

Since the Sikhs turned out to be only marginally less tyrannous than the Pathans, the Dhar family earned no gratitude, at least from Muslims. In fact, the Dhar name had spelt repression ever since twenty-eight embroiderers had drowned in a marsh as armed troops chased them pell-mell from Bal Kak's grandfather, Raj Kak's, mansion on 29 April 1865. They had gone there to burn his effigy and demand better emoluments. For reasons such as these, *Dar abaad, Kashmir barbaad* was a common sentiment muttered sotto voce among Muslims: Pandit prosperity meant trauma for them.

That there were far more Pandit landlords than Muslim, and Pandits had more manufacturing and trade licences, were not the only economic facts that rankled. Focus on the Pandits' stranglehold on jobs too had sharpened since a remarkably large number of Kashmiri Muslims, about half a dozen, had returned with degrees from Aligarh Muslim University in September 1930. Within weeks, they had formed a Reading Room Party, the closest thing to a political outfit that the regime would tolerate.

In November 1930, a group of Reading Room Party boys had gone to Jammu, the winter capital, to vigorously protest the recruitment norms that the regime had introduced. The new rules were designed to make qualifications the key to jobs instead of patronage, but the boys called it a conspiracy against Muslims—since they were the ones less qualified. In a convoluted way, they were demanding positive discrimination.

They went first to the sole Kashmiri Muslim minister, Agha Syed Hasan, but he hemmed and hawed and kept changing the subject. When one of the boys, a strikingly tall fellow, stabbed a long forefinger towards the minister and insisted that the norms be scrapped, the minister sorrowfully said that he was but his master's voice. For action, they must go to G.C. Wakefield, the English senior member of the Regency Council charged with governing since the end of 1929 during the maharaja's sojourn in England and France.

They plunged forth. They got no relief but the Englishman got a taste of the lanky youth's hauteur. A man of riotous rage, he hated

the fact that a Pandit who had, like him, returned with an MSc in chemistry (but from Banaras Hindu University rather than Aligarh Muslim University) had got a lecturer's post at Sri Pratap College, while he had had to settle for a temporary master's post at Islamia School. So, after beating up the Pandit at Barbarshah in the lane from the college to the Pandit ghetto, he had become a dynamo of the Reading Room Party.

He would normally never have been invited to the Round Room for, though his late father and the elder brother who brought him up had made tidy sums trading shawls, they were not upper crust. But his energy at the Reading Room Party had been noticed enough for someone to mention him while the invitees, some of whom had travelled from outside Srinagar, were trickling in. So Pir Maqbool, the host, told his younger brother to fetch him from the high school where the tall man had been hired as second master just a month earlier. The boy pedalled off—and, whenever he told his grandchildren the tale decades later, flushed with pride at the memory of the part he and his bicycle had played.

He asked around at the school for Mohammed Abdullah—for that was the tall man's name—and was soon pedalling furiously back with the last-minute invitee perched heavily on his pillion, a man whom the gathering storm would toss to such dominance that history would remember him vividly even when it forgot the rest. Indeed, if it were to recall any of the original invitees, it might be another of the least significant men there, a theologian called Mohammed Sayeed Masoodi, as young at twenty-six as Abdullah.

Masoodi was the sort who would have sat mouse-like in a corner of the Round Room, observing, filing mental notes. Abdullah, on the other hand, would have strode in like a colossus, baring large teeth. He had presence, boundless confidence, and looked striking in the Turkish fashion—as if he had handed the tailor a picture of Kamal Ataturk. And his richly mellifluous baritone mesmerized as soon as he uttered even a greeting. So when the host decided to call the meeting to order with a reading from the Quran, Abdullah volunteered to recite. And he did it with such sonorous depth that everyone was moved.

Pir Maqbool would tell his family later that he decided at that moment that the man would be an invaluable asset if the common

herd needed to be mobilized. He was right, only he had underestimated. Abdullah was an icon by the end of that year and his biographer Yusuf Teng would remark decades later: 'Sheikh Abdullah became Sheikh Abdullah at that meeting.'

Although that gathering in the second week of March 1931 marked the start of a movement that would oust the maharaja, unleash a powerful sense of identity and lead to a radical socio-economic transformation, it did not mean to. Resentment over insufficient jobs and other economic opportunities for well-off Muslims bubbled beneath the surface, but the meeting's main concern was the status that upper-crust Muslims would be given when they congratulated His Highness. In fact the telegram drafted there assured the maharaja utter fealty. Like children vying for a parent's caress, they wanted nothing more than to show their ruler they loved him more than the Pandits, by hosting a separate and grander reception.

Naturally, they got upset when the irritated maharaja refused both invitations. Now, in a place filled with large and brittle egos, the collective sulk of the leading lights of the majority community was dangerous. Although no revolutionary plan emerged from that meeting, those that had been there were quick to react when a couple of insignificant busybodies far away sparked trouble, inadvertently.

The 29th of April that year was Id and a large majority of His Highness' male subjects gathered in congregations to pray. Like most non-Muslims, sub-inspector Khem Chand had no idea that there was more to the ritual than serried ranks of white-clad men bowing and kneeling in tandem. He was on duty at a small prayer ground in the Dogra citadel, Jammu, and he took his job seriously. Suspicious at what might be a political harangue in a foreign language, he stopped the priest soon after he began the *khutbah*, the Quranic reading and interpretation.

News of that coalesced with word from an even smaller prayer ground not far from Jammu that an officer had stopped a congregation from using a community tank for the ritual wash. Muslim mood turned incandescent. The smouldering Id rage crackled as it swept up the ridges from Jammu, to be keenly fanned as the valley's Muslim leaders discovered just the outburst to relieve their sulk. The priests and pirs who had been in the Round Room, and

their myriad acolytes in mosques across the valley, worked up a lather of indignation.

Highly strung at the best of times, Kashmir was hysterical by the time Maharaja Hari Singh, who had been on the high seas with his wife and baby on Id, got home. So Wakefield, the English senior member, invited Muslims from both Kashmir and Jammu to send representatives to present their grievances at a royal audience.

That only set the stage for more trouble. After a mammoth meeting at the Khanakah mosque elected seven representatives—including Abdullah—a squat bulky Pathan with eyes that gleamed over a curved moustache in a huge head hectored the dispersing crowd, riveting it with booming rhetoric on the profanity of being ruled by Hindus. An English tourist had recently brought him to the valley as cook but he called himself a *ghazi*, nemesis of infidels, and some said he could speak six languages.

To the regime, his speech was seditious in any language. But his arrest became the new focus of anger, which turned explosive after a fresh incident that was actually an accident. When head constable Lakha Ram of Jammu central jail found constable Fazl-ud-din still sleeping while the rest were getting ready on the 4th of July, he angrily yanked the constable's mattress and a page of the Panjsura selection of Quranic verses that the constable had tucked under his pillow fell down. That was reported with foul exaggeration, as word of it crossed the Pir Panjal's ridges, turning into a metaphor for Hindus desecrating Islam.

This finally stung the Muslim masses into agitation. The procession that began the mass movement was arrested quite near the Dastagir Sahib shrine in front of the Round Room but it was not led by any of the landlords or merchants who had dominated that meeting. It was a procession of the much disparaged *hanz*, boatmen. Fakir Mirak Shah Kashani, the pir who held sway near the Shalimar garden of the Mughals, led them—perched atop a pony. The boatmen's courage sparked others and noisy swarms agitated daily near Srinagar's courts, making it tough to even bring the squat Pathan from jail.

To avoid further trouble, the regime decided to try the Pathan inside the jail. It could not have asked for more trouble. It was at the jail that Kashmir's anger erupted, almost as climactically as France's had burst upon another jail.

It was in fact the eve of Bastille Day. From early morning on 13 July belligerence jostled at the jail gate till it collapsed. The throng exploded, slicing telephone wires and setting the police barracks on fire. The panicked policemen fired, killing almost a score—twenty-two by afternoon. The trial forgotten, an irate procession hefted the bodies through the inner city, exploding in Maharaj Ganj, the chaotic wholesale market dominated by Hindu traders. Shops were vandalized before the rioting ripped north to Vichar Nag, the ancient forum for debate. Three Hindus died, 163 were injured. Several women were assaulted.

After the militia took control by evening, the tables turned. Hindus attacked and molested Muslims. Islamic fervour, smelting for weeks, turned to lava. The Jamia mosque became a magnet; the main procession stopped there, at the heart of a city across which cavalry galloped and gunfire punctuated screams. Pushed to centre stage, Mohammed Yousuf Shah, the Jamia mirwaiz, would hereafter be remembered as 'the mirwaiz'.

That night, Abdullah and a couple of others were arrested from the mosque yard and, two days later, were incarcerated in the fort on Hari Parbat. Kashmiris remembered what the Nilamat Purana said: that the entire valley was a sea till Kashyap the sage bored a gash in its side with hard penance for jets to gush through as the Jhelum. The sea became a valley but the malevolent Jalodbhav, having lost its undersea romping ground, made life impossible till the goddess Sharika, disguised as a dove, dropped that hill from her beak to trap him. Legend has it that that underwater spirit still lurks beneath that hill, stirring trouble.

While Abdullah was in the fort on that hill, a bevy of priests, orchestrated by men like Pir Maqbool and Masoodi, conjured a symphony of whispers, canonizing him. His touch had cured, they said, and his name was legible on the radiating leaves of the chinar, Kashmir's grand maple. They remoulded his name from Master Mohammed Abdullah to Sheikh Abdullah and then 'Sheikh sahib', to play up the rarely used caste title. Being a prefix, the sheikh surname meant his family had converted during Pathan rule from Pandit stock. Superior Kashmir took bloodlines very seriously—despising, for example, the same title as a suffix, for then it denoted a caste of cleaners.

For Masoodi, it was a political projection strategy but wheels were surely turning within the wheels of Pir Maqbool's mind. He and his sort needed desperately to revive credulous faith. It was the key to their income and their ability to uphold the feudal order. The superstitious faith of the wretched masses had been getting dangerously eroded. One of the mirwaiz's relatives had founded Anjuman-e-Nusrat-ul-Islam, a social association of Muslims, and its social reform committee had since 1925 campaigned for small weddings, limited dowry, no circumcision parties and other such social changes. The more puritan Anjuman-e-Ahle-hadis too had been set up during that decade. The pirs had been unable to prevent it, although they had created such a hue and cry when Husain Baktu had first preached Ahle-hadis doctrines in Srinagar during the previous century that Hari Singh's grandfather had been forced to exile him.

Like those who would rule or want to rule Kashmir after him, Hari Singh focussed on geopolitical manoeuvres from external forces rather than socio-economic and doctrinal pressures from among his subjects. Indeed, the social revolution that would continue through the rest of the century would hardly be noticed. For it was destined to unfold in tandem with an extraordinary tussle for ownership of Kashmir. A tussle that would turn Kashmir into a pawn in the strategic games of great powers, and perhaps it had already become that in 1931. Hari Singh for one suspected that the empire was punishing him for his nationalistic speech at the 1930 Round Table Conference in London. So he sacked Wakefield. Perhaps he was right. Abdullah would later tell his biographer he shared the maharaja's suspicion about Wakefield's role.

Abdullah tried to make peace when the Pandit who took charge as prime minister released the prisoners, persuaded, among others, by two erudite leaders from Mahatma Gandhi's Congress party, Tej Bahadur Sapru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. They had arrived to plead with the government for liberality and among the people for secular confraternity. But the truce collapsed when on 21 September 1931 Abdullah was arrested once again with a colleague—for disguising street demagogy as fund-raising for the Islamia School's annual conference.

This time, Abdullah became the spark. The valley erupted and three men were killed in police firing the next day. The regime reeled, astonished at how far Kashmiris could hurl emotion. (Their calculated exaggeration of wretchedness had been so successful that an earlier prime minister had, but two years before, pitied Kashmiris as 'dumb-driven cattle'.) Instead of dampening the rebellion, the firing fuelled it. A day later, twenty-one persons—or so the official report said—were shot in Anantnag, the city in the south of the valley. Some of them were less than ten years old. Srinagar's toll could have been catastrophic that day, for the 50,000 who had gathered for the funeral of the previous day's three victims threatened to set the city on fire unless they could all go to the burial ground. Disaster was only averted when a minister arrived with permission.

Among others arrested that night was a young man called Ghulam Mohammed. He would one day vie with Abdullah for public prominence but was an unknown teenager when Masoodi had first spotted him a few weeks earlier examining the handwritten posters his friends were pasting along a street, approving each like an exacting production manager. When Masoodi asked his associates if they knew him, one of them brought the young man across. Over the next couple of years, Masoodi's whispering troupe ferreted out the lowborn fellow's suitably distinctive surname, Bakshi, and added him to the pantheon over which Abdullah towered.

On the night Bakshi was arrested, the police tried to take Saduddin Shawl too but the currents coursing through the city had made the dapper merchant more defiant than at his exile. He was holding out behind locked and barred doors when a ripple spread at dawn that the mirwaiz had called a jihad, and that brought waves of humanity from every side. Throughout the 24th of September, Srinagar was flooded with men brandishing knives, axes and whatever else they could grab. No policeman dared emerge.

Martial law clamped the city that night. Over the next few days, a hundred Muslim men with notions of social eminence were flogged naked. Martial law seized Shopian too, not far from the cliff over which herds of elephants were once driven because their terrified trumpeting made the Light of the World quiver beneath a Mughal emperor—

Empress Nurjahan had tingled ecstatically at the piercing panic of one that had slipped off while the imperial tent was pitched nearby. Now, a Hindu policeman was lynched in Shopian after firing from the police station windows. Flogging was Shopian's lot too; perhaps the screams stinging leather elicited on naked flesh titillated Dogra Rajputs like the trumpeting of elephants in an abyss had an empress. Men were herded to identification parades while Dogra soldiers looted their shops, searched their homes and assaulted the women there. Petty officials, Dogra and Kashmiri, piled up money and ardently received women visitors. Terrified neighbours had given whatever they could to avoid being flogged on the charge of sedition.

For eleven days, any man or woman who did not jump instantly to salute a soldier or a state flag was battered, although the law did not require salutes. Such was Shopian's terror that when four soldiers barged into a house, its master flung himself from a window and, when they shot questions at his wife, she collapsed, dead. Most of Shopian fled before martial law was suspended on 5 October.

Hari Singh had decided by then that he had to entreat the empire, convinced that it was egging on his rebellious subjects. The liberals of Lahore—the closest metropolis to his state—had been full of criticism and protest. That did not affect Hari Singh at first, until a Muslim political group, the nationalist All India Majlis-e-Ahrar, got involved. Driven to dynamism by an eroding base—since it had stayed away from Gandhi's civil disobedience movement—many thousands of Ahrar agitators had slipped across the fields into the south-west corner of the state in September and again at the end of October. They were full of zeal to fight alongside their oppressed co-religionists. The second infiltration was massive.

These intruders from Punjab panicked the maharaja, for firing on British subjects could unsettle his crown. Hari Singh must have paced the halls of his palace under portraits of his forebears, thinking unhappily of his uncle, and predecessor. That uncle's brother, Hari Singh's father, had walked into the royal chamber one day, brandishing letters showing that the maharaja was in touch with Russia and involved in a conspiracy to murder the British Resident, his own brothers and a maharani. The maharaja had furiously denied having written any such letters but his brother had sneered: he had informed the British that the letters were in the maharaja's handwriting, although, he had

added, he could not be sure of the signature. The maharaja was forced to give up his powers to a council headed by that brother. Its decisions got prior approval from the British Resident, half-ambassador–half-governor. When the maharaja wrote to the viceroy two months later, pleading to be restored or he should 'shoot him through the heart as life had become unbearable', the pitiful letter found its way to the press. And his humiliation continued for sixteen years.

The empire had been breathing down Hari Singh's neck too, ever since the valley had erupted in July. The Raj's attitude had changed radically since 1925, when the viceroy had simply marked the memorandum about the silk factory firing to the maharaja. In 1931, telegrams expressing concern reached the British Resident almost daily, not only from the Raj's summer capital, Simla, but even from London. A telegram from Simla on 25 September 1931, the day martial law was imposed, indicated that the Raj was thinking of unseating the maharaja and taking direct charge. It read:

> GOI [Government of India] take a very serious view of situation not only owing to possibilities in Kashmir but also to reactions on communal situation in British India . . . While regretting the necessity for giving authoritative advice to Durbar, they believe that following measures are essential if permanent improvement is to be obtained without active intervention of Government . . . H/H [His Highness] should take definite and immediate steps to remedy more of the grievances of his Mohammedan subjects such as cow killing ordinance, prohibition of Khutbah, stoppage of azaan and other measures in which Kashmir laws differ markedly from that of British India to detriment of Mohammedans . . . We regard delay as very dangerous and consider that action should be taken before statement of demands is put forward.

When, in October, Hari Singh turned to the English governor at Lahore, the empire snapped magic. British troops marched into Jammu in the first week of November. A viceregal proclamation banned the Ahrar agitators. And the liberal press across the empire forgot the plight of Hari Singh's Muslim subjects—who had hitherto been portrayed as wretched in the extreme, even though settlement

commissioner Walter Lawrence had written after examining every nook of the valley four decades earlier that Kashmir's poverty was not as bad as that of India's heartland plains, which were directly under the British heel.

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Whether or not the empire had stoked Kashmir's fires, it was the British that gained from Kashmir's 1931 explosion. It paved the way for negotiations from October 1934 for Hari Singh to lease Gilgit to the British. Gilgit was the road to Central Asia, the silk route from China to the Arabian Sea. The state was called Jammu and Kashmir since Jammu was the seat of the Dogras and Kashmir, although it had just a twentieth of the kingdom's area, contained a third of the population. But the sprawling, almost uninhabited expanse of Gilgit was key in the global balance of power.

The East India Company had ignored that northern plateau when it sold Kashmir to Hari Singh's great-grandfather, Gulab Singh, immediately after winning it from the Sikhs in 1846. But a decade or so after taking over the East India Company's territories in 1858, the British Empire had become seriously worried that Russia might reach southward to the warmth of the Indian Ocean. British control over the Pathans in the Afghan frontier was tenuous and Gilgit was an equally vital front.

Hari Singh's grandfather, however, would brook no interference. He refused to allow a Resident, only an officer on special duty specifically to look after British travellers. Finally, after meeting the viceroy just beyond his borders in 1876, he had agreed to the appointment of a British agent, officially called that, in Gilgit. But that did no good. Disdained by the maharaja, all the agent could gather in four years was the suspicion that the maharaja was in touch with both the Russians and the Afghan chieftains. The agent was withdrawn in 1881.

Now the relationship between India's maharajas and the British Empire was determined by the singular doctrine of paramountcy. It allowed rulers to rape every subject as long as they remained loyal to the empire, but allowed the Raj to oust those that seemed dangerous to English purpose. Hari Singh's grandfather, however, sailed through

the sludge of smear campaigns, appointing a commission with members from outside his kingdom to disprove press reports that he had drowned Muslim subjects by the boatload during the famine of 1877. So the frustrated empire weighed its options and, chary of the impact on other vassals of leaning harshly on one that had galloped to its defence when rebellion had raged across the plains in 1857, opted for the patience of a vulture.

Hari Singh's grandfather's body was still burning on an elaborate pyre amid a sea of rose petals, marigolds and mango leaves on the bank of the Tawi on 13 September 1885, when his eldest son had a visitor. It was the British officer on special duty, Sir Oliver St John—who was so pleased with the meeting that he would later write a blow-by-blow account to the viceroy.

He had a message from His Excellency, he said, after the normal courtesies and condolences, but had been instructed to deliver it before the royal council. When the young prince replied uneasily that he had not yet appointed a council, Sir Oliver evenly informed him that he was referring to the members of the late maharaja's council. The prince called for Diwan Anant Ram to be sent in but that did not satisfy the officer on special duty. He asked if it would please the prince to ask Babu Nilambar and Diwan Gobind Sahai to join them too—adding that he knew they were just outside the chamber.

Once they were all seated and psychological pressure was at a peak, Sir Oliver announced that he had been ordered to inform His Highness that His Excellency, the viceroy, was pleased to recognize his succession to the throne of Jammu and Kashmir. The new maharaja bowed in gratitude, eagerly conveying his deepest appreciation to His Excellency and vouchsafing his devotion to the British Empire.

Seeing that he had the young man exactly where he wanted him, Sir Oliver thrust home: His Excellency had also instructed him to inform His Highness that he was forthwith appointing a Resident for Kashmir—and Jammu. The letter, dispatched from Calcutta well before the late maharaja's death, had only said 'for Kashmir' but the new king was so transparently nervous that the Englishman had decided to take charge of the entire state.

He did. And after Hari Singh's father became the Resident's pliable instrument four years later, an agent returned to Gilgit. The jagged

edges where the kingdom met the north-western fringe of China were then subtly pushed through nomadic settlers every summer. Intrigue-laden negotiations between the two empires went into limbo around 1905 but the matter came to a head in 1929, when China sent troops across the mountains to dig in.

That prince's inglorious reign had ended by then and it was clear that Hari Singh was in his recalcitrant grandfather's mould. He had, a couple of years after acceding in 1925, reserved permanent residence and government jobs for descendants of his great-grandfather's subjects—mainly to keep out His Imperial Majesty's Punjabi subjects. And like the first Gilgit agent, the current one—and the Resident in Srinagar—got scant regard. Indeed, so loath was Hari Singh to send for cakes from Nedou's hotel, where the English took tea, that he sent the son of Abdul Ahad ('Ahdoo'), the baker, to Firpo's in Calcutta's Grand Eastern Hotel to learn better confectionery than available at Nedou's. And he built a golf course next to his new palace, across the temple hill from the Civil Lines course at which natives were not allowed. Nor did his speech at the 1930 Round Table Conference please the British in the least.

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Be that as it may, we can only speculate on the part that geopolitical manoeuvres might have played in shaping the dramatic events in Srinagar in 1931. We can be far more certain of the part played by socio-economic frustrations and communal tensions. They did so, however, only in large towns like Srinagar. For the most part, ordinary Kashmiris across the rural expanses still lived isolated lives, oblivious to the complex world of trade and geopolitics, except when revenue collectors visited. Let us nevertheless take a look at what life was like for them, for it was the dawn of an age when even nobodies in remote corners would be drawn into the rough and tumble of politics.

Manigam was tucked just where a river gushed from a ravine to descend with the stately sweep of a princess into the expansive valley of the Jhelum. It was a large village, though it hardly looked big enough for the local story: that Emperor Akbar had once fed 80,000 there. It might well have happened though, for Kashmir had meticulous chronicles. The Mughal meant no doubt to gently tighten his rein, but

the exquisite beauty of the place too must have drawn him. By 1931, though, life in Manigam was too wretched for anyone to feed tens of thousand. Indeed, when Ali Mohammed Sheikh was born there that year, his parents would have had little inkling of the momentous events in Srinagar, just 30 kilometres away.

The way houses were built in those days, Ali's father would probably have sheltered in the shed beside the mud hut that was kitchen and dining and sitting and bedroom, all packed into one. Straw mats on the cold earthen floor were the only furniture; coarse blankets and quilts lay folded by day and a wooden spinning wheel sat dutifully in a corner. It was still homely, though, compared with the shed, crowded with hay, a bony cow and farming tools, its mud walls and rough thatched ceiling not high enough for a tall man to stand straight.

Ali's father would have squatted there, exhausted from running to fetch the midwife, and sighed loudly in self-pity. He might have focussed fearfully on the one his wife had lost more than a year before. It had been September and she had collapsed in the fields, oozing blood. Though she was just a teenager, she could not have stayed home during the harvest. They tilled a large patch but it yielded little and losing any paddy could mean starvation. Two-thirds went to the landlord and the state, and the rice that was left after Ali's father had given portions to the barber and the baker barely fed them for seven months. He had to find labour where he could so that the family could eat watery spinach or pumpkin curry with crusty, flat round bread for at least a couple of the remaining months every year. That is how life was then for all but the very few landlords and merchants.

To fight such circumstances was unthinkable. Every sort of fortune, good, bad or undecided, was ascribed to God's pleasure or displeasure, or to angels or fairies, or to the malignant workings of devils or djinns or ghosts. And the way to keep God pleased and the skulking armies of the malignant at bay was to beg for intercession from a saint or an ascetic or one who behaved crazily but was reputed to perform miracles, or at the grave of any of these.

One such grave was tucked into the mountain spurs above Manigam, in a village called Yar Muqam, friend's abode. Sheikh Nooruddin Wali, Kashmir's kindly patron saint, had named it that, for one of his seven chief disciples had lived there. Wandering the valley with a band of disciples in the fourteenth century, Nooruddin

Wali had won many hearts with a pithy wisdom that wove all nature into a swathe of selfless love. Kashmir revered him as Alamdar, flag-bearer of spirituality, but respected him only in obsequious veneration or weeping supplication at his or his disciples' graves, rarely pondering his richly simple aphorisms. The religiosity that Syed Mir Ali and Nooruddin Wali moulded focussed on metaphysical paths to God. But it was practised as a demonstrative set of observances, to obtain favours rather than transcendental union. Trees and springs and men, even the occasional animal, were venerated—as able to dispense blessings or curses.

So, after the rituals of propitiation and protection at home—the black mark on the child's face to repel the evil eye, the prayers and the threads and lockets—Ali's family would have taken him to the grave at Yar Muqam six weeks after his birth. The baby's grandmother must have gone too, moving heavily no doubt with muttered prayers to put her in a trance as she trudged through the forest—a symphony of greens over tiny springs and slipping mud. Then she would have dropped with a deep sigh of security onto the stones of the pillared veranda under the pyramidal roof sitting quietly over the mystic's grave. A barber would have been found to shave the child's head in that auspicious place.

It is safe to assume that a mendicant would have been sitting there in a torn *phiran*, wizened, his beard unkempt. He would have held the baby and uttered words such as: 'This boy is blessed. He will be an important man.' Then, holding up dirt-stained palms, eyes tightly shut, he would have swayed on his haunches, mumbling for several minutes, before whispering the child's name.

Ali was not destined for greatness but his life would, over the next seventy-five years, encapsulate many aspects of Kashmir's story—radical social change, political liveliness, the opportunistic pursuit of wealth, pelf and influence, dissatisfaction and frustration. It is important to highlight a true story such as his, for history has been made by nobodies as much as by kings and high priests. More than any other period in history, the twentieth century provided previously undreamt of access and opportunities and has belonged to nonentities from some of the remotest areas. So the best way to understand Kashmir's story, its aspirations and confusions over this extremely

turbulent period is to focus on the ups and downs of the lives of one or two ordinary Kashmiris. Ali's life would turn out to be something of a roller-coaster ride, for his bit role was to make him both a puny exploiter and a victim of terror. And so complex, so filled indeed with the sorts of complexes that might overwhelm a psychiatrist was Kashmir that thousands of little tyrant-victims and victim-tyrants have together constructed its sordid story.

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Political Churning

It was characteristic of Kashmir that the explosion of 1931 should have occurred unplanned, without long-term political or social goals. But it was a catalyst: the Reading Room Party turned, over the course of the next year, into a political party called the Muslim Conference. It was a time when modern politics was taking shape in different parts of the world, particularly the Indian subcontinent, and the leaders of these movements had a clean slate on which to design models for the management of communities emerging from a feudal, agrarian past into the opportunities of the twentieth century.

The party evolved organically for a couple of years, demanding jobs for Muslims and the reopening of mosques that the regime had shut. Meanwhile, it struggled for ideological moorings. It was of course a Muslim party, but a subtle tussle had begun even during the agitation of 1931 to decide what kind of Muslim. The syncretistic tradition that feudal priests like Pir Maqbool represented faced competition in the 1930s from two newer strains of Islam. The Westernized Ahmediya sect (which many Muslims considered un-Islamic) had mentored the 1931 movement from Lahore, setting up a Kashmir Committee. But they had been upstaged by orthodox Deobandi thinkers—by 1933 the poet-philosopher Allama Iqbal had taken the chair of the Kashmir Committee and by then Deobandi men in Kashmir like the mirwaiz and Masoodi had already marginalized Ahmediya do-gooders.

The term Deobandi refers to anyone affiliated to the madrasa at Deoband, which was to have seminal importance through the rest of the century. Muslims in India generally subscribed to the liberal Hanafi tradition and the religiosity of converts from the lower castes had evolved over centuries towards a shrine-oriented, lyrical Islam. Deoband began in the nineteenth century as the instrument of Ashrafi

Muslims, who claimed Arab and Central Asian descent, to reform what they perceived as syncretism. The once-dominant Ashrafi were motivated in large part by a desire to match the rectitude of their contemptuous Victorian rulers.

The mirwaiz, Yousuf Shah, who had patronized the Reading Room Party boys ever since they had organized a grand funeral for his predecessor early in 1931, was a staunch Deobandi. His puritan attitudes contributed to the clash that developed between him and Abdullah during that turbulent summer, which affected the course of the party's development. From the mirwaiz's powerful perch, Abdullah must have looked like he was getting too big for his boots—and he must have seemed too doctrinally flexible. The mirwaiz was perturbed by Pir Maqbool's influence on Abdullah, and horrified by Abdullah's flirtation with Maulvi Abdullah's daughter, who had arrived from Lahore that tyrannical summer resplendent with MA and BT degrees, brimming with sympathy. The maulvi was an Ahmediya and to Yousuf Shah that was apostasy.

A few days before Abdullah's arrest in September 1931, the mirwaiz complained about women participating in political meetings, and on 11 October warned a congregation at the Kanil mosque not to listen to Abdullah's speeches. Five days before that, an earthquake had let the cat out of the bag. Some of Yousuf Shah's associates had been scheming at Bal Kak Dhar's house when a series of tremors forced them to scamper out. Political gossip being Kashmir's lifeblood, everyone talked of it non-stop as collusion between the mirwaiz and the regime.

While Abdullah was still in jail early the next year, Yousuf Shah tried to reclaim ground with an agitation. He walked a tightrope when the maharaja's courtiers got the landlords' network to dissuade him. While announcing that the general strike would cease, the priest held his fist aloft, tightly clenched. When the agitation continued, Hari Singh jailed him. Since that was more than the priest had bargained for, his next message was more direct. And his landlord friends made sure he was suitably rewarded.

Abdullah's bile never took long to rise and, soon after his release, he punched a crushing blow. Waving a piece of paper dramatically before a congregation at the Khanakah—revered at least as highly as the Jamia, for it had been built by Shah-e-Hamadan Syed Mir Ali—

he announced that he had evidence: the maharaja had given the mirwaiz the revenue from 75 acres on the bank of Anchar lake, and it was worth 600 rupees a year. That effectively punctured the mirwaiz's hold, at least beyond the congested downtown area surrounding the Jamia. He attended the inauguration of the party but stayed away thereafter.

Now, it was largely up to Abdullah to steer the party towards either the austere orthodoxy of Deoband, the Westernized values of the Ahmediyas or Kashmir's traditional belief systems, full of the supernatural. Abdullah personally leaned towards Deobandi doctrines, which he had absorbed at home and at Aligarh Muslim University, but he revelled in the stellar role, predicated on the blind faith that had once belonged to the Syeds, which the power of the pirs had catapulted him into. So he gave that primacy in the party, although he accommodated all the strains—even the Ahmediyas, with whom he had a good rapport.

To a large extent, he was only keeping the powerful leaders of the various doctrinal branches happy while—with Masoodi at his right hand, as general secretary—he turned the party from a vehicle of the educated, landed and trading classes into a mass movement. Then, an alternative ideology entered the field, even more intently focussed on a mass movement. In 1934, a dynamic youth group that included communists led a hugely successful mass agitation. Rather than compete with their popularity, Abdullah inducted them into his party. Under their influence, the party began to fight for farmers to be allowed into forests to gather wood, for taxes on shepherds and farmers to be reduced, and for newspapers to be allowed. Beginning at the silk factory, the party set up associations—for motor drivers, tonga drivers and carpet weavers. An umbrella Mazdoor Sabha came up in 1937 and a Kisan Sabha for peasants in October that year.

Abdullah was not dogmatic and was happy to go along with Marxist programmes, for he could see how responsive rural people were to them. That was his talent: spotting the political current and riding it. Neither he nor his more ideological colleagues grappled with the contradictions between the ethnic and religious identities by which ordinary people define themselves and the Marxist presumption that those at the bottom of the social ladder see themselves only as a dispossessed class. Ideologues like Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq did not explore the parallels between Marxist and Islamic tenets—often more

explicit than the Biblical precepts that Liberation theologians would work with a few decades later.

People like Ali Mohammed Sheikh's family could not even begin to absorb communist ideology but the fiery rhetoric of the party's left-wing leaders, and of Abdullah himself, carried them along. In the bargain, the rival groups of the religious elite lost ground. In the mid-1930s, Abdullah gave in to pressure to expel the Ahmediyas. And he alienated the Khanakah mirwaiz. However, so vital was the halo of sainthood that the pirs had given him in that summer of 1931 that Abdullah's sonorous recitations from the Quran and Islamic slogans such as *Allah-o-Akbar* remained central to the party's appeal. Thus, it was to Abdullah's superhuman image and the party's Islamist veneer rather than the party's communist programmes that the common people responded.

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People in Ali's village, for instance, responded to Abdullah as to an angel—almost a deity. His egalitarian talk did not make much impact in principle, for it was far too novel, but he struck a chord with his oratory on their misery. By the time it happened for the first time in Manigam, Ali had grown into a smart boy, tall for his age. Piercing grey eyes with a hint of steely blue darted constantly, his mind racing with ideas on how to make an impression. Ali was in class five, the highest level at the little village school, and it was there one autumn morning that he heard Sheikh Abdullah was coming the next day.

Excitement rushed through the boy. He had heard how Abdullah had beaten up the maharaja's Pandit doctor because the latter's buggy had not let his bicycle pass. How he had roared that they could kill him but not still his voice. How, when he was still in college, he had thrashed octroi men for beating a woodcutter who had not paid tax on a load of firewood—the tax that was levied on all goods entering the city for sale. The Lion of Kashmir, they called him, and said he could work miracles, cure the sick. He could even speak against the maharaja, Ali had heard. The highest imam could not do that, for he would rot in jail till the end of his days. Even the mighty mirwaiz had called the maharaja *zilillah*, shadow of God. The teacher waved his stick though, saying darkly that rebellion was evil and any boy

who went to the meeting would be expelled. But the ageing teacher, slightly deaf, had to cope with all five classes. He did not notice when Ali slipped out the next day.

The great man had not yet arrived but half the village had turned out, each in a tattered grey phiran, the loose gown that had begun more than a thousand winters ago as a blanket burnt through the middle with a hot stone. They hoarded embers in *kangris* inside the phirans, all squatting under a giant chinar, its flaring leaves blood red under the umbrella of yellow that was gradually falling wasted to the moist dark brown earth.

Ali snuggled into a corner, trying not to be noticed. When Abdullah finally spoke, his voice sounded to the boy like a bugle from heaven. How can anybody free you, he thundered, as Ali glowed pink, his blood racing with the excitement of the forbidden. You are in a cage, he said. Become aware of the new age. The world has changed. He spoke of poverty and bondage. Of landlords. And when Abdullah spoke of *begar*, forced labour, Ali shivered. He remembered watching wide-eyed, terror pulsing around him, the day the entire village had cowered as the *patwari*, keeper of revenue records, sat in the house of the *numbardar*, whom the regime held responsible for the village, and demanded eight begars. The patwari was furious because Manigam had been unable the previous week to find a horse for his son to ride home. The labourers had to carry tents and a lorry load of equipment for a couple of Englishmen trekking to Mohanmarg, the meadow high above the village where another Englishman had camped more than a century before to translate Kashmir's ancient history, *Rajatarangini*.

Hari Singh had abolished begar—which the Sikh regime had introduced along with the *mujawada* crop tax around 1820—but it went on. Officials summoned any poor Kashmiri to heft as much as he could carry on his back. In the old days, it was supplies for soldiers across the freezing, barren mountain plateau around Gilgit. That had been ghastly slavery. A begar used to be tied to other begars by day, rarely fed. At night, his ankles were bound together. Few returned from those jagged icy paths that wore down slippers of dry grass in a few hours. If one died, a son or brother was summoned to take on the load. It was like a funeral when a begar left the village.

By the time Abdullah finished speaking, the community had been captivated.

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There were a couple of Pandit families in Ali's village who were relatively poor. In the light of Kashmir's history of communal and sectarian conflict, they stayed away from the new political churning although, by the time Abdullah visited the village, the party was trying to reach out to them too. In fact, even before the inclusion of the communists, the Muslim Conference had not positioned itself as anti-Pandit and some prominent non-Muslims were associated with the party.

Budh Singh was one such. He had come a long way since he had been sacked as head of a district administration for insisting the maharaja pay for the previous day's begars before any more would be summoned for that day's hunt. This had made him so popular that the nascent Muslim Conference had invited him in the summer of 1932 to address a function on the Prophet's birth anniversary.

Budh Singh, who hailed from one of the state's few Sikh families, had spoken fervently at that function of how Hindus and Muslims were one. It was a bold speech, for communal tempers still ran high a year after the firing at the jail. He touched a chord. When a riot erupted at Kani Kadal on 22 September 1932—over, believe it or not, a schoolboys' procession to mark Health Week—fifty Hindu and fifty Muslim leaders attended a tea party at Rainawari to build bridges.

Abdullah had waded into the mob, physically defending Pandits, and had then written in the Jammu-based newspaper *Ranbir* that the rioters 'have not shown any sign of civic life. Their action is abominable. I am, however, happy to see that they have obeyed my appeal and have bid goodbye to their quarrels.' He followed up at a public meeting at Ganderbal the next year with Marxian analysis: 'It is true that the Hindus number more among oppressors but it is also true that, like you, they have a majority of the poor and oppressed among themselves.' A couple of years later, he joined the Pandit secularist, Prem Nath Bazaz, to launch a leftist newspaper, *Hamdard*,

although he withdrew his investment and launched *Khidmat* as the party organ when Bazaz criticized him in print.

The influx of communists after 1934 and the subsequent exit of Ahmediyas and the Khanakah mirwaiz from the Muslim Conference increased the momentum for secularization. Members of the party's labour union were required to believe that 'every community has in it both good and evil elements, and a Muslim capitalist is as oppressive for a labourer as a Hindu capitalist'. This trend bolstered those who wished to respond to pressure from men like Bazaz and Budh Singh to open wide the doors of the party to every community.

It was not easy, though. A hundred minutes ticked by after midnight on 12 June 1939 before the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference could agree in a plenary session—after a year and a half of preliminaries—to declare itself the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference. The resolution had been adopted by the working committee after fifty-two hours of debate, yet four out of eighteen had voted against. Among those four was Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, the tallest political leader of Jammu.

Nor did the agreement last.

The Muslim League developed gale force across the Indian heartland soon after, its notion of a clash of civilizations between Hindus and Muslims sweeping along most Muslims. Jammu, along with areas to the west of it, swayed to the strong gusts blowing in from Punjab, so close in geography, language, culture and genes. Marxist ideas in any case addressed Kashmir's impoverished Muslims more than Jammu's relatively more prosperous ones. In fact, they plucked a more responsive chord among Jammu's landless Hindus, particularly untouchables.

There was another reason too. Shock waves had passed south-west across the Pir Panjal when the nascent National Conference had announced its interim working committee. The state Hari Singh's ancestors had put together over the previous eighty-odd years was an ethnic patchwork, but the valley always thought of itself as the centre of the world. Poonch at least had complained, in gruff Pathwari, to see its lone Kashmiri-speaking leader inducted instead of the incumbent. And Abdullah ignored a proposal that the firebrand communist, Allah Rakha Sagar, be named general secretary for the Jammu region. Masoodi remained the sole general secretary of the party.

Although it had been born out of the anti-Pandit resentment that had filled the Round Room in March 1931, the party had evolved since 1932 into an instrument for the advancement of Kashmiri interests. And packaged though it was as representative of all the people of the state, Abdullah's party had become the tool of the ethnic Kashmiris who lived in the lush terraces in the middle of the valley, an area of around 120 kilometres by 40 kilometres. Among his people, Abdullah was trying to forge a unity that Kashmir's web of hierarchies had hitherto prevented. But the construction of every identity excludes others. If the Muslim identity excluded minorities within Kashmir, the Kashmiri identity excluded peoples of other parts of the state—or so at least it seemed to some of them.

Actually, it did not exclude the rest of the state's people, only suborned them. Abdullah's rhetoric often harked back to Kashmir's independent history but not to its historical territory—which was just the valley and a small area around Muzaffarabad to the west. He did not want to separate from other parts of the vast state that the Dogras had cobbled together. Kashmir's deeply ingrained conviction of superiority was almost unconsciously shaping an imperial template upon which to base its polity, one that would allow the Kashmiris at the centre of the valley to dominate the rest of the state. It was an unstable template, for it was not backed by military might or economic clout. Indeed, it was not even consciously drawn out.

As the unstated ethnic agenda of the party became apparent, in tandem with the growing pull of the Muslim League's two-nation theory, Abbas and Sagar left to revive the Muslim Conference a year after the party's metamorphosis. These Jammu-based leaders initially feared that their party would be marooned in the valley but the mirwaiz was delighted to shove in his oar against Abdullah. With him on board, the Muslim Conference could project itself as the real voice of the state's Muslims, its propaganda funded by landlords rattled by the National Conference's revolutionary rhetoric.

The relative strengths of the two parties became apparent quite soon, although both retained at least some following. In the city, such an all-consuming animosity developed between them that marriages and

social interactions almost never took place between adherents of the rival parties. And physical violence was easily sparked.

One day, two of the National Conference's most promising leaders, both destined to succeed Abdullah, were sitting at the party office. Masking a smirk, Ghulam Mohammed Bakshi did his best to shut out the drone. He had to figure out the list of members he was poring over. Elections were coming up in the carpet weavers' association and he had to ensure that his man won. But the drone would not stop. It was earnest Sadiq, in linen jacket and dull brown tie. Even his wife had never seen him without a tie, they said. He was holding forth as usual, between sips of tea, on the virtues of radical humanism and the joys of dialectical reasoning, while two young party workers listened wide-eyed.

Sadiq, the affluent communist, and Bakshi, an inner city conservative, had been given the same name, Ghulam Mohammed, meaning the Prophet's slave, but they were as different as chalk and cheese. Apart from their names they shared only one other thing in common—both were passionate about the party. As Sadiq droned on at the party office, Bakshi gathered his papers, put them in a drawer and got up to go to the inner city. An efficient manager, he intended to make sure his man had enough votes. The carpet weavers' association could become huge.

Just then a boy burst in, yelling, '*Bakre.*' Goats were coming, he said, as he caught his breath. Bakshi leapt to him in two strides, demanding to know what he meant. Goats were coming to burn Qara sahib's building, the boy replied. Sadiq's cousin and equally influential party leader, Mohiuddin Qara, owned a building on the other side of the uptown plaza from the party office and bakre—'goats'—was what the party cadre derisively called the mirwaiz's men, because of their straggly beards.

'I'll get the tonga-wallas from the stand while you hold them off,' Bakshi said quickly.

Sadiq had built a strong tonga men's union. But Sadiq frowned at Bakshi and sagely pointed out that the poor men in the mob were of the proletariat, being exploited by the reactionary classes. What would Marx have wanted them to do, he asked.

Bakshi kept his head down as he walked briskly into the street. In five minutes, he had a few score men from the tonga association

and the motor drivers' association—his bastion. Both stands were just outside the plaza. The 'goats' were soon beaten back, thrashed.

That was the pattern, not only of Bakshi and Sadiq's styles, but also of relations between the mirwaiz and Abdullah's party. An even bigger clash in 1939 had convulsed the city for days. It began on the city's finest street, built to connect the bridge leading to the plaza with the recently metalled Jhelum Valley Cart Road from Uri (and Lahore beyond). Called of course the Maharaja Hari Singh High Street, it was quite short but swept to the bridge in an arc from the road just before it got to the palace. So the two groups did not see each other enter from either end, and once they were on the street, neither could turn back. That would have been an admission of defeat, for they were there to campaign for the Srinagar municipality and it was a battle of great prestige.

Using the art of branding, casing flaw as virtue, the mirwaiz had established the Azad ('Liberated') Muslim Conference a few months after attending the Muslim Conference inaugural meeting. His party had won a single seat, the area around the Jamia, in the first assembly elections in 1934—an assembly having been recommended a couple of years before by the commission headed by a British judge that Hari Singh had been persuaded under British pressure to appoint around the time he had asked for the empire's help. The Muslim Conference had swept the rest of the twenty-one unreserved and elected seats for Muslims.

The mirwaiz's landlord-merchant backers had been aghast. The voters' list was tailored for them, limited to men who had passed middle school and had an annual income of at least 400 rupees. That meant about 3 per cent of the people—without a single boatman Hanji or goatherd Backerwal.

Since 'goats' were concentrated in the city, this time they hoped to win the municipal elections. Naturally, tension mounted as the antagonists approached each other on Hari Singh High Street. Both sides set up a din, trying to out-shout the other with slogans. The 'goats' called Abdullah's lot heretic. He called them traitors. Then the two groups were at each other, jostling, shoving, shouting, abusing. Shawl, that dapper merchant, was leading the 'goats'. He was a candidate. Ever ready for a brawl, Abdullah strode straight to him, jeering. Traitor, he called him, turncoat.

That was too much for a man whose family for decades had had the first rights on disdain. A shining brogue landed on Abdullah's posterior.

Violence enveloped the city, lasting days.

Shawl was the only 'goat' to win but he never went to the municipal committee. He had only wanted to prove that Abdullah was not invincible, he announced, while resigning.

The rancour between the groups smouldered as long as Abdullah lived. With it remained the pattern of the merchant's lone victory: The mirwaiz's party, whatever its name, held fast in its inner city bastion. Abdullah retained a grip on much of rural Kashmir.

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Ambivalence

Sopore bustled. It was a little city, much smaller than Srinagar, but its heart beat faster. Lorries kept trundling in with goods from Lahore and beyond for barges to carry on to Srinagar. And Sopore loved the clink of coins those barges augured. Squeezed from Suyapur, it was named for the engineer, suckled by an untouchable, who married welfare economics with Wild West enterprise in the ninth century. When he poured King Avantivarman's treasury into the silted river, Kashmir had dived exultantly in, bringing up boulders and fists full of mud to sift for coins. Silt cleared, floods receded, famine ended.

Kashmir had converged on Sopore in the early autumn of 1945, excited. The new messiah, Abdullah, had promised a blueprint as audacious as Suya's to make the river of prosperity flow again. In little knots, old men and young tried to make sense of what they had heard. Landlords were to be swept out, party workers said, and the land would belong to those who tilled it. What some people found weird was the talk of a right to rest. Another bit was as confusing. Women were to be paid the same as men and have all the same rights. That sounded very odd, but it was all right, Kashmir figured, as long as pay came home. Some actually trundled handcarts to Sopore to carry back the promised *hukook*, not knowing the size or shape of these newfangled rights, but hoping that pots of coins from someone's treasury might possibly be involved.

Actually, few even within the party had grappled with what *Naya Kashmir* would signify to people like Ali Sheikh's family. 'New Kashmir' had been drafted in Lahore by a group of communists including B.P.L. Bedi and Freda Bedi, Qurban Ali, Danial Latifi and Kashi Nath Bamzai—the last of whom was to become Nehru's secretary. The party sent it to the maharaja immediately after adopting it at its Sopore session

as its manifesto. It promised equal suffrage and wages for women, an end to landlordism, land to the tiller, central planning and the centrality of children's welfare in every state decision. It had a workers' charter and a peasants' charter. Among the rights it guaranteed were of conscience and worship, the privacy of homes and to rest.

These promises clearly meant a lot to the party at the time, for the Sopore session was the party's grandest ever. Thousands of faces bobbed across the vast tent, workers rushed about and party enthusiasts poured in like ants. From a distance, the ground outside was a sea of red, as if Kashmir's blood surged there. It was flooded with party flags, each scarlet with a white plough jutting up in the middle: communism for tillers.

Splendid houseboats had been towed from Srinagar for the general council members to stay in. And draped in white sheets, the podium rose at one end of the vast tent like a two-tier cake: lower level for the general council, apex for working committee and guests. Jawaharlal Nehru was on that upper tier, and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan—Frontier Gandhi—with Saifuddin Kichloo of Lahore, Samad Khan from Balochistan and Dawood Ghaznavi from Sind. All were leaders of the Indian National Congress for, by then, Abdullah was quite happy with that alignment. He had tried to make friends with the Congress' greatest antagonist but the move had backfired.

In fact he had become worried soon after the Muslim Conference had been revived. An opposition led by a stodgy priest did not bother him much but those gusts from Punjab were vexing. The Pir Panjal insulated his valley, as it always had, but the mountain and even Kashmir's great notion of self-worth might not stand against that most powerful force: religion, Islam.

So he had decided to win over his opponents' most powerful ally. It was such a potent initiative, and such a sore memory, that Abdullah told his biographer a great deal about it. How, when he had first gone to Bombay in February 1944 to invite Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the League icon had said he was too busy to visit Kashmir but could meet him again when an assembly session took place in Delhi. How Abdullah had taken Bakshi with him to Delhi in April the same year. How he had then sent Bakshi to Banihal at the edge of the valley to receive the brilliant solicitor—after Ghulam Abbas too had received him warmly in Jammu. How he had chosen Pandit Pran

Nath Jalali to recite a poem by Iqbal in a welcome address before the throng he had gathered for a mammoth reception.

Even the patrician Jinnah described that reception as 'royal' over lunch at the home of Agha Shaukat Ali, the Muslim Conference general secretary who would become Pakistan's first information secretary. But Jinnah was not in Kashmir to bask in flattery. He soon came to the point on taking the mike after Jalali's welcome address. Saying that this regal welcome was for his party, not him, he began to extol the mirwaiz's piety and hector the National Conference to merge with the Muslim Conference.

Abdullah swallowed dismay and frustration and made several visits to the mansion beside a Mughal garden where Jinnah stayed a month, but Jinnah never budged. His party would accept Abdullah as leader of Kashmir only if he joined his rivals. The Muslim Conference promptly shifted its annual session from Poonch to the Muslim park behind the Jamia—as if to cock a snook at Abdullah. Rage finally burst in Abdullah's breast as he sat behind a curtained window nearby, listening. This man is misleading you, Jinnah was telling the Muslim Conference plenary about Abdullah. When he talks to me, he says he is with me. Then he goes out and says he is a nationalist (at the time, the word was generally used for those close to Congress).

The iceberg had no inkling of the power of the lurking tsunami. The next day, Abdullah began a public campaign. This man does not know how to read the Quran, he thundered. He does not even know the first kalima, he said, exaggerating. Within days, Jinnah had to ask for government protection and become a state guest. If he had known the impassioned hyperbole of Kashmiri responses, he might have made haste to Rawalpindi. Instead, he stopped in Baramula to address a small reception organized by Chaudhary Abbas's brother, who headed the administration of the valley's north district. National Conference workers pulled Jinnah off that stage as their energetic young leader Mohammed Maqbool Sheerwani forced a garland of shoes onto his stately shoulders before pushing him into his car. Loud jeers roared like black smoke behind it.

Jinnah would never forget that humiliation.

Abdullah did not care. As he showed at Sopore a year later, he could still fall back on the Congress for support. The antagonistic notions of nationhood that inspired Jinnah and Nehru meant little

to Abdullah and his followers, wrapped up as they were in the preoccupations of their little world. He was only looking for the most powerful continental allies he could find as, with the backing of his people at the centre of the valley, he tried to dominate the sprawling state the Dogras had put together.

That is why Abdullah had thought nothing of trying to cosy up to the Congress' arch opponent after the Congress had nurtured a relationship with his party since 1931. Indeed, he had gone to Peshawar in January 1938 to make friends with Nehru, joining him on the train to Banu and Kohat. And he had stated while presiding over the Tripura session of the State People's Conference (the organization the Congress had floated for people from areas of the Raj ruled by rajas and nawabs) on 14 March 1939 that the Kashmiri people 'will take rest only after having owned the ideal and basic principles of the Indian National Congress'.

Such behaviour might strike one as inconsistent, even duplicitous, but it was of a piece with Abdullah's simultaneous admiration for the Deobandi thinking he had matured with and for the Ahmediyas whom Deoband considered heretical—and for the communist agenda that both considered the devil's work. It was of a piece too with his request to Chief Justice Berjor Dalal, who had investigated the events of 1931, to try and get the regime to sponsor him for further studies abroad. That request was known to some of his admirers and accepted without opprobrium. He even confirmed it to his biographer. Neither he nor his admirers saw it as untenable. Slightly disconcerting perhaps, but not unconscionable.

Such are the values that Kashmir's unstable social order, syncretistic religiosity, fecund environment and centuries of colonial repression have engendered that opportunistic ambivalence is par for the course. A tendency to run with the hare and hunt with the hound has become common. Ali Jan, one of Kashmir's most celebrated doctors, once told a friend, Syed Abdul Wahid, that he was constantly pushed to brusqueness because his patients never told him directly what their aliment was. Smiles that could be grimaces and shrugs that dance so nimbly they could be yes or no, or neither, are staples of communication. Describing a people in such generalized terms might seem like Orientalist profiling but a group of people in a particular

time and place do tend to develop common behaviour patterns, although these are by no means absolute or all-inclusive.

The problem is that Kashmir's behaviour pattern makes it tough to gauge sentiments. Solicitude is de rigueur but that might mean a bachelor is asked how the children are, and whether they are in good health—all with the doting depth of heartfelt concern. It is tough to say, therefore, whether Pandits and Muslims love or hate each other. Both in fact are true. They live an elaborate ritual of warm amiability with loathing lurking at the bottom of the heart like dregs in an over boiled cup of dark *kehwa*, almost but not quite bitter.

To an extent, this tendency to keep options open affects the rest of the subcontinent too, only it is more dramatically expressed in Kashmir. And it was there that it would lead to much distress by century-end, when Kashmir would face not only geopolitical choices but ones that involved paradigms of identity: ethnic or religious.

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Puritanism is of course the best antidote for ambivalence. An organization that would half a century later face Kashmir most forcefully with choices regarding its identity had not yet developed a political ideology in the 1940s. But its founder's precepts had already made an impact on pious Muslims across India.

A couple of Kashmiris first encountered it at a commune called Dar-ul-Islam—home of Islam—near Pathankot, a few hundred kilometres from Kashmir, just a couple of months before the National Conference adopted its radical manifesto in 1945.

The day they arrived, the pair found themselves gawking at a little shop in the commune. It was small and simple, just whitewashed bricks. But it was spotless. Everything was neatly laid out. Candles and soap and the few other things a pious Muslim might need. Prices were neatly marked but there was no shopkeeper. At first the timid pair, one dark and small, the older a fairer medium build, thought the keeper had gone out for a bit, but then they saw it was the same in all the shops. Unmonitored, customers left money for whatever they picked up.

Indeed, the entire commune seemed like a revelation of the proper godly life. At its centre was a mosque and near that the central office

of the new organization they had come to join: the Jamaat-e-Islami. Everyone in the commune was serious and earnest, devoutly dressed and bearded, heads and shoulders covered, hands more often than not holding a string of prayer beads.

Both men were exhausted after their journey by lorry, horse cart and train from Kashmir to Pathankot but the disciplined serenity of Dar-ul-Islam revived them. It was the closest thing to paradise they could imagine on earth. The older one was called Saduddin Taribali. Simple and serious at the age of thirty-six, he was one of those few thoughtful Kashmiris who perceived his people's petty foibles. The sort who might, when he was older and even wiser, say with wry despair that if you give a Kashmiri a knife, he will test its sharpness on his brother's back. It deeply troubled him, though. Educated and therefore exposed to puritanical ideas and comparisons with other cultures, he was bent on following Islam the way he had rediscovered it.

He regularly went to Nur Mohammed Booksellers in the heart of Srinagar to pick up whatever new Islamic literature he could afford, and never failed to buy *Kausar*. That was the periodical of the Jamaat-e-Islami, the movement to regenerate Islam that Abul A'la Maududi had launched in August 1941. When Saduddin saw an advertisement in *Kausar* for a convention of the Jamaat in Punjab in 1945, he decided he must go.

His brother-in-law had come with him—Karri Saifuddin, who was almost a decade younger, and for whom the memory of that trip would remain as fresh fifty-six years later as if it had been the day before. A neighbour and distant relative of Pir Maqbool, he had grown up in the cathartic milieu of Abdullah's party. But Saduddin had gradually weaned him away from that early passion for the National Conference.

Both were elated on their first evening at Dar-ul Islam. For, among the several hundred there, they had spotted another Kashmiri, Ghulam Ahmed Ahrar. Hailing from Shopian, he had, while he was a student at Amritsar, adopted the name of the Ahrar party. All three sat together when the convention opened next morning and listened raptly to Maududi. The way at least one of them remembered it half a century later, there was no talk of politics or controlling the state.

Maududi in 1945 spoke to them of how important it was to be totally dedicated to God, ever ready for the Day of Judgement but, while on earth, to always extend a hand of friendship.

That simple message planted in the minds of Saduddin and his two companions the seed of a disciplined religiosity very different to the one Kashmir was used to. Abdullah's messianic leadership drew great sustenance from that traditional religiosity but the seed that was planted at Dar-ul Islam would yield an orthodox, doctrinaire strain that would become Abdullah's most potent opponent when he floundered three decades later.

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Devious Manoeuvres

The blue sky promised an early summer, a fine mist hanging at its edges. The scene would have been perfect but for the ruins of the Fairy Palace. Its greying brown stones glistened dully amid a forest that rose like a painting from the water. The Fairy Palace had been the observatory from which Dara Shikoh, the Mughal heir apparent doomed to a savage end, had tried to read the stars. Its ruins now looked sadly down at the city, picturesque behind the curtain of poplars at the other end of the lake.

It was still cold and there were few boats out that day. The one Sadiq was riding with Abdullah must have felt alone in paradise—judging at least from what Sadiq related to his colleague and successor as head of Kashmir's administration, Mir Qasim. Abdullah had just been telling Sadiq that he wanted to launch a Quit Kashmir movement. It would address not the imperial power, as Gandhi's Quit India campaign had, but the Dogra maharaja.

Sadiq was one of the few who dared speak his mind before the party boss but he knew he had to choose his words carefully. Abdullah's temper was mercurial. Yet, this could not be said delicately: Hari Singh would pack them all off to jail. He had given them a longer rope than most of his ancestors would have dreamt of (his great-grandfather had had rebels skinned alive, stuffed with hay, and displayed) but telling Hari Singh to quit Kashmir was like kicking him in the stomach.

They must consider, Sadiq added, that if they were in jail next month, they could not meet the British Cabinet Committee. The new Labour government, reeling after the world's most terrible war, was visiting India to discuss how independence should be given, to one or two nations, and it had agreed to receive a National Conference

delegation. It was a chance, pleaded Sadiq, to add their party's weight to the Congress' opposition to the League's two-nation theory.

Then Sadiq came to the other point: it was tactically unwise to break with the maharaja at a time when the state might possibly discover an independent destiny in the debris of empire. After all, he pointed out, Hari Singh had tried to accommodate them. Under a system he called dyarchy, his prime minister had invited the party in 1944 to nominate a minister, to join the landlord Ganga Ram Wazir, whom the court had appointed to represent the Jammu region. Abdullah had sent one of his most erudite colleagues, Mirza Afzal Beg. But then, in March 1946—just a few weeks before the boat ride—he had signalled Beg to resign.

Abdullah heard Sadiq in silence, gazing out over the water. He had begun to brood a lot recently. Unhappily. The effervescence of Sopore had fizzled out in just one winter, the Marxian manifesto too esoteric to spark Kashmir's mind. Barely a few score turned up for his public meetings now and Abdullah's ego could not stand that. He had become addicted to adulation. So, without further ado, he hurriedly redrafted the party manifesto as *Naya Rasta*, 'New Road'—virtually repeating Naya Kashmir but adding a demand for the abolition of monarchy.

On 13 May 1946, he clambered onto the roof of a bus at the crowded terminus in Srinagar and announced the Quit Kashmir agitation. It was the first time most of the working committee heard of it. Sadiq would say in private, when he was the torn state's chief executive a quarter century later, that Abdullah created Kashmir's crisis with that 'illegal' action.

Legal or illegal, he did it with gusto. The party's town crier was a handsome, hefty young man with a great booming voice. He strode from one crowded market to another over the next couple of days, shouting with all the power in his lungs that Sheikh Abdullah would be there that evening. Everyone must come to hear him, for he was going to announce that he would burn seven bridges—or seven districts. Each announcement would end with rousing slogans against Dogra raj.

Abdullah's speeches were no less histrionic, nor his voice less impressive. Kashmir's corpses would rise from their graves, he said,

as if trumpeting Judgement Day. Ripping their shrouds to shreds, they would shout slogans against Dogra raj and for the Treaty of Amritsar to be torn to bits. This was the treaty through which the maharaja's family had bought Kashmir exactly a century before.

Abdullah had read his people's pulse right. Tens of thousand flocked to hear his apocalyptic tirades. Of course, while the new campaign fired Kashmir's imagination, it unnerved the maharaja's home, Jammu. Such hyperbolic slogans as *Hari Singhun buol, Khudayan gool* prayed for the annihilation of the ruler's progeny—generating more bitterness than any amount of sweet-talking could temper for future rapprochement.

That venom, some of Abdullah's colleagues thought, was his response to the regime's success in persuading a party leader, Mian Ahmed Yar, to take Beg's place as minister. On the other hand, Abdullah may have calculated that the impending departure of the British might afford an opportunity if he raised the stakes in a bid to rule the state instead of the maharaja.

As Sadiq had predicted, the party's leaders were jailed—within hours after the twenty-one-gun salute from the fort on the hill announced the maharaja's summer shift to Srinagar on the 20th of May. Not that Abdullah bothered. Shrugging off the charge of sedition, he told the court he was not personally against monarchy. So he was sentenced to nine years in prison while two of his colleagues heard the death sentence.

Sadiq and Bakshi escaped to Punjab but Abdullah did not authorize them to represent the party before the Cabinet Mission, which ignored the memorandum the party had mailed in April. Carefully crafted, it had held that the National Conference represented 'the Kashmir nation', without mentioning other portions of the state:

> The fate of the Kashmir nation is in the balance and in that hour of decision we demand our basic democratic right to send our selected representatives to the constitution-making bodies that will construct the framework of Free India. We emphatically repudiate the right of the Princely Order to represent the people of the Indian States or their right to nominate personal representatives as our spokesmen.

No royal nominees but no elected representatives either. The word used was our 'selected' representatives.

By October 1946, Abdullah found himself in the same jail as Chaudhary Ghulam Abbas, and had apparently had enough time for second thoughts. Both would later tell Josef Korbel, the Czech member of a UN commission, that Abdullah told Abbas in prison he regretted their separation and wished they could resume a common struggle. But it was too late. The previous decade must have left Abbas too cynical to try again. And Abdullah's move had in any case spun off a boost for the other party: it had won a thumping majority when the National Conference boycotted the 1946 elections in line with the Quit Kashmir campaign.

From jail, Abdullah sent a message to Bakshi and Sadiq in Lahore to explore possibilities with putative Pakistan's leaders. The Marxist poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz—who had been married in the Sri Pratap College principal's house—tried hard to put the duo in touch with either Jinnah or the man who would be his prime minister, Liaquat Ali. But all he could manage was a meeting with the nawab of Mamdot, who was to be the chief minister of Punjab.

Jinnah was not given to cutting secret deals. Nor at this stage did he think he needed to. He smugly told Agha Shaukat, his future information secretary, that Kashmir would fall like a ripe fruit into his lap.

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One fine September day in 1947, Ali Mohammed Sheikh found himself perplexed, trying to figure out whether Kashmir had indeed dropped like a ripe fruit into Jinnah's lap. The boy loved to wander, his teenaged mind constantly probing. He was married now but part of him was still a boy. So he was happy to lope with his father to the market in Ganderbal, the nearest town, a bit of straw tucked between his teeth. They were going to buy rope to bind the grass that had been drying for a year in an outhouse of baked mud. They had to replace the rotting thatch on their roof. Luckily for them, the monsoons had not whipped the place torrentially that year but, if it did rain, water poured into the hut through two holes that gaped wider than mountain springs.

Ali Sheikh's lithe step had given way to a duller walk by the time they got to Ganderbal but, as they approached the row of shops, he stopped short. His father testily pulled his elbow but Ali Sheikh's neck remained craned towards the post office, a little cottage with carved wooden eaves. It was not the carving he was staring at. It was the flag on the roof, a green and white flag. Ali Sheikh knew it was the flag of the fledgling Pakistan.

He was confounded. The National Conference, he knew, was not keen on Pakistan. Its leaders were all in jail or underground, and he had not heard that the maharaja had made Kashmir a part of Pakistan behind their backs. For Ali Sheikh, as for most Kashmiris, the sun set behind the slopes of Gulmarg on the western flank of the valley, although he knew there lay beyond a vast, intimidating place called Punjab, and far beyond—halfway to paradise, he figured—*vilayat*, Europe. Indians lived in Punjab and the English came from Europe, but now he had heard there would be a Muslim Punjab and a Hindu Punjab. One would be called Pakistan, the other India.

Notwithstanding the flag that had startled Ali Sheikh, Jammu and Kashmir had not yet become part of either of the new countries—although history had flowed fast over the past few months, swelling like a river in spate around Hari Singh's palace and his opponents behind the thick walls of his jail. On 22 March 1947, a blue-blooded English admiral, Louis Mountbatten, had arrived in New Delhi with a plethora of laurels from the Second World War. His task as viceroy: to take home the British flag before June 1948 with as much dignity as he could muster. He soon realized that the safest way to do it was quickly. The previous summer's Cabinet Mission had recommended a federation that vested most powers in the provinces. But a federal coalition of the Congress and the Muslim League had virtually collapsed trying to agree on even defence, foreign relations and communication—about the only subjects the Cabinet Mission Plan had left to the federal government. So, deciding swiftly that to get the Congress and the League to work together was a tall order, Mountbatten turned to the partition option. Boosting morale had been one of his most dependable talents in battle. Now unleashing his charm on the two parties, he quickly got them to fall in line.

On 3 June, he announced his plan for partition. And, caught off guard by a reporter's question, he set a date, off the cuff. 15 August would be the second anniversary of the Japanese surrender to him when he was Supreme Allied Commander in South-east Asia. So it seemed to him like the best date. With just seventy-two days to go, he announced it.

Until then, he had negotiated with British India's two main political parties, ignoring the 565 rajas, maharajas and nawabs that ruled tracts large and small across the empire, all vassals of his cousin, the king emperor, through the doctrine of paramountcy. Summoning them finally in mid-June, Mountbatten said that, at least with regard to external relations, defence and communication, they must accede to either India or Pakistan before 15 August.

Hari Singh's decision was the least predictable. His state was contiguous to both but, while he was Hindu, three-fourths of his subjects were Muslim. Topography pointed to Pakistan but one of the two major parties in his state was out of tune with its two-nation theory. 'If he acceded to Pakistan, a large chunk of his people, including his entire Dogra base, would have been outraged. If he acceded to India he risked alienating a large section of his Muslim subjects,' his son Karan Singh would later write.

So Hari Singh prevaricated, hoping to wring independence out of indecision. He even hinted at the possibility in an article he wrote in *The Pioneer*, calling his fellow princes to carefully assess their options in these unsettled times. Telling both India and Pakistan he needed time to decide, Hari Singh proposed a 'stand-still agreement' with each. Eager to retain control of all the road and communication links from the state, Pakistan readily signed. The postal service belonged to the empire rather than the rajas and, all the post offices in the state being linked to Rawalpindi and Lahore, Pakistan replaced the Union Jack with its flag over every post office on Independence Day—making Ali Sheikh's neck swivel towards that cottage in Ganderbal.

India did not respond to Hari Singh's proposal for a stand-still agreement but Mahatma Gandhi turned up a week before the transfer of power. He refused the goat's milk and fresh fruit that Hari Singh offered, sitting along with his wife and son on the gleaming palace lawns. Sitting glumly, Gandhi advised Hari Singh that his prime minister—a Pandit with an English wife and sons in the Royal Air Force—was unpopular and that he should find a way to ascertain whether Abdullah had the people's backing.

Pakistan was alarmed at this meeting, just a week before independence, especially when Hari Singh dismissed the prime minister—who was said to have advised independence. Predicated as their nascent nation was on the notion of a Hindu–Muslim civilizational clash, Pakistan's leaders could see no option for a state that had registered a 77.8 per cent Muslim population in the 1941 Census but to accede to Pakistan.

Unease turned to rage when the borders between the new nations were made known. It was drawn up by the Radcliffe Commission, which both the Congress and the Muslim League had agreed to accept. But, dashing Pakistan's expectations, it allowed a road link from Jammu to India's plains. Almost simultaneously, Hari Singh ordered a bridge be quickly built across the river between his kingdom and India. He was probably only making sure his options remained open but rage turned to desperation in Pakistan at September-end when Hari Singh released Abdullah while retaining pro-Pakistan leaders like Abbas in jail.

Both India and Pakistan thought Abdullah spelt India. Neither knew of the letter Abdullah had written to the maharaja from jail on 26 September. Karan Singh would reveal it years later. It was an amazing letter for a man who liked to be called the Lion of Kashmir.

> In spite of what has happened in the past, I assure Your Highness that myself and my party have never harboured any sentiment of disloyalty towards Your Highness' person, throne or dynasty. The development of this beautiful country and the betterment of its people is our common aim and interest and I assure Your Highness the fullest and loyal support of myself and my organization. Not only this but I assure Your Highness, that any party, within or without the State which may attempt to create any impediments in our efforts to gain our goal, will be treated as our enemy and will be treated as such.

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Pratap Park was appropriate for transition from one set-up to another: socially, it was no-man's land. West of the park was the bustling modern

plaza into which the city spilled in the congested, cackling cages of Kokur Bazar, the chicken market. To the east of Pratap Park was the English enclave—Lloyds Bank, the Suffering Moses emporium and the other grand stores where the upper crust shopped after tea and scones at Nedou's across the polo ground.

Several hundred National Conference workers had gathered around the makeshift rostrum in the park one chilly October day in 1947 when Mohammed Sayeed Masoodi got up to speak. He much preferred to write speeches for others but this one he could not avoid delivering. He had been released from jail that morning and this function was to welcome him back.

He began by saying that a lot had changed while he and other party leaders had been in jail. India and Pakistan had come into being as separate nations and the party would have to consider carefully . . . He never got beyond that, for just then his coat was tugged sharply from behind. Stage management was his forte but, he told his confidants later, his shock dissolved to amazement as he turned unobtrusively to find Abdullah. The party boss moved up beside him. 'Maulana sahib is tired,' he boomed, 'and will speak at length at our next meeting.'

Across the subcontinent, history was moving rapidly and Abdullah, who hoped it might bring opportunity, did not want his general secretary to take a public position. His own first speech after his release a few days earlier had had something for everyone who wanted to read meaning. But the key was:

> Our first demand is complete transfer of power to the people in Kashmir. Representatives of the people in a democratic Kashmir will then decide whether the state should join India or Pakistan. If the forty lakh people in Jammu and Kashmir are bypassed and the state declares its accession to India or Pakistan, I shall raise the banner of revolt and we face a struggle. Of course, we will naturally opt to go to that Dominion where our own demand for freedom receives recognition and support.

He evidently had not meant a word of the letter that had obtained his release. The public statement firmly rejected monarchy.

On the other hand, Nehru's secretary, Dwarkanath Kachru, was given a more nuanced impression. Kachru wrote to Nehru from Srinagar on 14 October 1947:

> 1. Sheikh sahib and his close associates have decided for the Indian Union.
> 2. But this decision has not been announced yet and the impression is being given that so far the National Conference have taken no decision.

But, he went on:

> . . . 7. It is also emphasized that the objective of the National Conference is the attainment of people's sovereignty with the maharaja enjoying a constitutional position and that this would be the main factor determining the decision of the Conference in the matter of accession. In short, they would join the Dominion which enables them to achieve these objectives . . .

In a nutshell, Abdullah preferred whichever country allowed independence, but with the maharaja out of power. His aspiration of course represented only the majority within that 120 kilometre strip along the Jhelum, but the territorial demand took the rest of the state's people for granted as part of the deal. Kashmir's ambivalence was running riot—although Kashmir did not know it yet. Its leader had not seen fit to consult even his party, leave alone the people in whose name he made these demands.

The party's leaders only got a chance to confront the critical issue a few days later, within the walls of Bakshi's brother's house in one of the Londonesque suburbs Hari Singh had added to Srinagar. Of the several dozen who squatted there that evening, some preferred to join Pakistan and said so. Finally, after a debate that had gone round in circles for several hours, Abdullah got up at about midnight and spoke at length of the ideological parallels between their party and the Congress.

Soon after the boss began, Bakshi lay back, covered himself with a shawl and began to snore. Abdullah and the rest ignored him but he rose after Abdullah had finished, yawned, stretched, and spoke loudly. He said he had not heard the speech but knew what must have been said. And he had just one observation: if the decision was to join India, it must be final. He for one would be quite happy to go with Pakistan. But whichever it was to be, they had to make up their minds once and for all and not try to change midstream. If the party decided for India, he would accept that and would then die an Indian.

'That is when we realized we had to be very cautious. Not everyone was with us,' Masoodi's loyal assistant Sofi Mohiuddin, who followed him like a shadow, would recall many decades after. Abdullah could ill afford not to have the unquestioned backing of his colleagues. Having already taken on Hari Singh, he was fighting two battles simultaneously and, in typical Kashmiri fashion, both were undeclared.

History was turbulent enough that summer to offer both Abdullah and Hari Singh hope, but the cross-continental currents of nationalism—one predicated on multi-ethnic inter-communal cohesion, the other on multi-ethnic pan-Islamic concord—were too vigorous to steer out of. Balkanization threatened both. Hari Singh in any case had a stronger hand than Abdullah. The Dogra-dominated Rajya Hindu Sabha passed a resolution backing independence with the maharaja at the helm. Then, publicly on 10 July and again within the party's working committee on 19 July, Muslim Conference acting president Chaudhary Hamidullah too backed that arrangement.

Not that any of them could speak for all the people of Jammu and Kashmir any more than Abdullah could. The sprawling state was a geographical and demographic mosaic, including people as different as Mongolians from Italians. It had never been a single unit until 1846, when the East India Company sold Kashmir to Gulab Singh (Hari Singh's great-grandfather) within days of winning it from his Sikh masters. It had been his reward. For, although the Sikhs had appointed him prime minister just a few weeks before, he and his troops had stayed away from the battle of Subraon, at which the kingdom of the Punjab collapsed to the British.

Gulab Singh had been in touch not only with the British. Unknown to his Sikh masters, he had made northward forays into Ladakh on the fringe of Tibet. So, within a couple of decades of purchasing Kashmir, he and his son welded a patchwork kingdom as large as Britain—and as diverse as most continents.

Poonch, for instance, was as similar to Kashmir as clumps of keekar to walnut orchards. Adjoining Punjab, Poonch's jungles were thorny, its hills rocky. Its people as rugged as the terrain, most of its young men had fought in the Second World War in the ranks of British forces. Now they were home, retired, restless. They hated Hari Singh, for he had a little before the war deposed the raja of Poonch—to whose forefather the British had given the title soon after they made his uncle, Gulab Singh, maharaja. The Poonchis, most of them Muslim, so loved their raja that women had spread their dupattas on the road when their expelled queen left the palace on foot.

The extortionist taxes Hari Singh imposed sparked the fires of rebellion in Poonch. A 'no tax' agitation in June 1947 was brutally suppressed and from its embers spurted a blazing cry for freedom. The maharaja's forces only added fuel to it, burning entire villages where a single home joined the revolt. And the uprising took on an Islamic tinge, not least because most of the state soldiers deployed were either Hindu or Sikh.

The National Conference had supported that revolt, dispatching two leaders there, but Poonch had not forgotten the shock of the party's first working committee eight years earlier. It turned gratefully instead to help from Punjabi Muslim officers. Two officers posted in the North-West Frontier, who were both destined to head Pakistan, Iskander Mirza and Isak Khan, arranged arms from the Frontier's thriving armaments cottage industry. Some of those arms even got to Tangmarg in Kashmir in time for an expedition that was soon to come from the areas they administered.

Disorder scrambled from Poonch across the Jammu hills and depravity caught up from Punjab. Tens of thousands fled their butchering neighbours, Muslims from Hindu-dominated portions of Jammu into Pakistan, and Hindus, mainly from Poonch, Mirpur and Muzaffarabad, eastward.

With parts of his state burning, Hari Singh would still not commit himself either way. Convinced, however, that he was about to sign himself into India, Pakistan pointed out desperately that all communication and transport led inexorably to the blessed west. To press the point, it strangled the state's supplies of fuel, kerosene, wheat, salt and cloth. And its banks stopped honouring Kashmiri cheques.

Hari Singh sent telegrams to Karachi protesting all this, and

armed intrusions and arms smuggling. Pakistan retorted that it was his forces that were slaughtering Muslims and sending raiding expeditions into west Punjab. On 15 October, Hari Singh offered 'to have an impartial inquiry made into the whole affair' but added that, 'if, unfortunately, this request is not heeded, the government much against its wishes will have no option but to ask for assistance to withstand the aggressive and unfriendly actions of the Pakistan people along our border'.

On 18 October, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali replied that 'the threat to enlist outside assistance shows clearly that the real aim of your government's policy is to seek an opportunity to join the Indian Dominion, as a coup d'etat, by securing the intervention and assistance of that Dominion'.

Indecision faced paranoia amid chaos in that third week of October 1947.

{6}

Partition

Maisuma tumbled in an ugly jigsaw beyond Kokur Bazar at the edge of the city plaza. It was the lair of bus and lorry drivers. Bakshi bustled around its narrow lanes, hefting in each hand a can of petrol—as precious as gold ever since Pakistan had stopped fuel supply. Despite the crisp October chill, he was flushed, as much with the effort as mounting pressure. His managerial skills had come to naught. He could not find a single driver. They were all lurking in neighbours' homes. Neither money nor threats would make them drive the two battered station wagons Bakshi had. They guessed he was trying to get to the airfield to help arriving Indian troops, and the drivers were unwilling to get caught in the crossfire.

Across the city, the air tingled that day. Inner city boys were out, clambering eight onto each tonga. Normally, no tonga driver who thought there was a policeman even at the other end of the city would dare take more than three passengers, but today there was no authority.

It was 27 October 1947 and Hari Singh had fled two days before. Raiders from Pakistan were in Baramula—an hour's drive away down a flat ribbon lined with poplars stretching stiffly upwards like even rows of an honour guard. The raiders were Pathans, thousands of ferocious Pathans. Marauding men who scorned all authority but of their tribal chiefs, they had for centuries infiltrated south for plunder and rape when icy gusts swept through their rocky homes in winter. The British had barely held them off with huge annual bribes and armed patrols on the edges of their frontier homelands but, with the British gone, they were a wild card. One that Prime Minister Liaquat Ali and the chief ministers of Punjab and the Frontier—unwilling to wait like Governor-General Jinnah for Kashmir to fall like a ripe fruit into Pakistan's lap—had decided to use.

Fed on gory stories of violence against Muslims, the tribesmen had swept into Hari Singh's chaotic kingdom in the early hours of 22 October but tarried on the way to Srinagar. They butchered and raped non-Muslims along their route from Muzaffarabad, not sparing even the nuns at a Baramula convent. Their progress was therefore slow but it unleashed history at a gallop. Hari Singh appealed to India for help, but Mountbatten—who had been asked to remain as free India's first governor-general—advised Jawaharlal Nehru, now the prime minister, that Indian troops should defend only Indian territory and so Hari Singh must accede his state to India if he wanted help. Faced with that ultimatum, Hari Singh sent his accession form before he left for Jammu. The covering letter said he was acceding because he had no other option and was giving up to India only the minimum Mountbatten had fixed: defence, foreign relations and communication.

When India's cabinet considered the accession on 26 October, Nehru told the meeting the decision ought to be backed by the people of the state. Congress had long taken that stand, and India was already applying that principle to take over Junagarh after its nawab had acceded to Pakistan. So the letter accepting accession noted that the Government of India wished to ascertain the will of the people as soon as peace was established.

For the moment, Nehru wanted a resolution from the National Conference working committee—on behalf of the people. Abdullah quickly scribbled a resolution, signed it as the party leader and sent it. He was sitting that evening in Nehru's house, having taken his family to the plains. He evidently did not think the invitation to Indian troops was permanent. When Colonel Adalat Khan, a Mirpuri officer of the state forces, had told him in Srinagar a couple of days earlier that the Indian Army would never go back once it had dug in, Abdullah told him dismissively that Jawaharlal would recall the army if he asked him to.

A tussle between opposing templates of identity had emerged at that meeting. Kashmir's ethnic aspiration was Abdullah's priority while Islamic identity animated some of the others present. Abdullah had pointed out that the tribesmen would drag Kashmiri women away for prostitution in Pakistan. Ghulam Ahmed Asahi—at whose home the Reading Room Party had grown—had replied acerbically that at least their bastards would be Muslim.

A few hours after sending that note to India's cabinet, Abdullah instructed Bakshi over the telephone to get to the airfield meant for Hari Singh's plane. Indian troops would land in the morning and he must guide them.

They had begun to land but Bakshi could do nothing to help. Kashmir for the most part was too disoriented and scared by the unexpected turn of events to know how to respond. The mirwaiz's backers wasted energy demonstrating with Pakistani flags in the inner city. They were still at it while, with National Conference cadre working like beavers to guide them, the Indian Army built bunkers west of the city over the next few days. The raiders attacked the edge of the city on 7 November, before the bulk of Indian troops could negotiate the raw overland route, but those who had been flown in over the previous ten days routed them with grit, tactical brilliance and some luck.

Abdullah had returned to Kashmir by October-end, and was now in power. Chief emergency administrator was the most Hari Singh had been willing to dub the man who had told him to quit his kingdom, but he had been forced to hand power to his antagonist. Nehru had insisted. Although the tribesmen were largely beaten back within days of his taking over and the Indian Army fought the rest of the war largely at the edges of Kashmir, the crisis allowed Abdullah to begin his reign in the way that came naturally to him—as a dictator. He posted trusted party lieutenants as emergency administrators in different parts of the state while Bakshi and Masoodi managed a control centre at the Regina Hotel, next to Nedou's.

Under their direction, party activists controlled Kashmir, but it was a confused Kashmir. Pockets of Muslim Conference support remained restive, even though many of their leaders, including Abbas, were still in jail—from where they were dispatched to Pakistan in an exchange of prisoners—and Yousuf Shah had secretly left for Pakistan. Among those who allied themselves with the mirwaiz to back Pakistan at this stage were some of the new Jamaat-e-Islami adherents, men like young Hakim Ghulam Nabi of Shopian.

Masoodi and Mohiuddin Qara went to see Agha Shaukat, general secretary of the Muslim Conference, and Yousuf Shah's cousin, Maulvi Nooruddin, to seek a compromise. But they met with no success. A huge pro-Pakistan demonstration was held at the Jamia.

That spirit only dissipated after a large number were killed in the firing ordered by Abdullah's emergency government.

A messy and fear-filled situation remained. The rapine and loot of the tribesmen had left trauma. They had even crucified Maqbool Sheerwani, the party worker who had garlanded Jinnah with shoes. The daring activist had led the tribesmen astray when, chancing upon him as he tried out a new motorcycle, they had asked for directions to the airport during the crucial hours when Indian troops were first landing.

Refugees from places like Muzaffarabad, who had fled the raiders, rushed daily to the airfield, to beg from behind the fences for seats on the planes returning to Delhi after dropping troops. A young party worker who would soon marry Abdullah's daughter sat in a little lane off the city plaza making passes for those planes but they were very hard to come by. The refugees were frantic by the time Vallabhbhai Patel, India's dour deputy prime minister, landed to assess the situation. Refugees besieged him at the airfield with heart-rending pleas to take them to India.

Stonily, he replied: 'Yeh bhi Hindustan hai.' This too is India.

Abdullah did not think so. He was intent on Kashmir's ethnic exclusivity. So, when some refugees went to him asking to be sent to Jammu, he promptly told Mir Qasim, a young assistant to Beg at the time, to make arrangements. Qasim got a dozen tongas together but, when they reached Nagrota on the outskirts of Jammu, the Muslim drivers were lynched. Jammu was soaked by then in an orgy of violence based on religion. Two daughters of Chaudhary Abbas were among the thousands of girls dragged away during that bloody season, never to be heard of again.

Hundreds of thousands fled to Pakistan while refugees from there churned more violence. Turning violent in the security of numbers, they hefted .303 rifles around Jammu. And in adjacent forests, training camps taught Hindu and Sikh boys how to kill. Mass migration changed the demography of Jammu significantly that winter of 1947. Ved Bhasin, who was students' union general secretary that year, would recount decades later that Jammu governor Chet Ram Chopra summoned him to say he would have arrested him had they not been of the same caste. Bhasin's crime: canvassing communal amity.

Abdullah's administration did little to rein in men like Chopra or

to pin blame, perhaps because the victims were generally Muslim Conference backers. Nor did that inaction bother Abdullah's Kashmiri supporters. Indeed, it is a measure of Kashmir's ethnic self-absorption that the lynched tonga drivers burrowed far deeper into its collective memory than the widespread violence against Jammu Muslims. Although Kashmir's Muslims and Hindus did not attack each other that year, they were both scarred by fear. Muslims focussed on the killings in Jammu within a predominantly Hindu India while Pandits felt threatened by the shift of power to Muslim hands.

Over the past few years, the distance between the party and large sections of Pandits had stretched almost to breaking point. Abdullah's instincts resisted the mindset that Muslims and Pandits were distinct ethnic groups half a millennium after the majority of Kashmir had converted to Islam. But he had had to walk a tightrope, since nothing fired the imagination of the large majority of his constituency more than Islam. His sonorous Quranic recitations had become his strongest political asset.

Even when the party first changed its name, though, Pandits had not helped Abdullah along that tightrope. They refused to compromise when he cited the Congress' use of 'Vande Mataram' to defend 'Allah-o-Akbar' at National Conference agitations. They protested his decision to celebrate the Prophet's birth anniversary—to counter a Muslim Conference function—and to commemorate the jail firing on 13 July as martyrs' day. Then they raised a storm over National Conference support to a Muslim Conference cut motion over the Pandits' stranglehold on jobs.

That of course was the nub of the problem. Secularism could not paper over socio-economic facts. A century and a quarter of Sikh and Dogra rule had combined with inherited aspirations to give Pandits immense economic clout. Class interests are often expressed in communal terms and no party can grow by protecting an unequal status quo.

Several leading Pandits left the party, even Bazaz. Along with Abdullah's authoritarian ways, he cited the party's condemnation of the optional script—Persian or Devanagari—system that a Tamil Brahmin prime minister, Gopalasami Ayyangar, had introduced in Kashmir's schools even after the Zakir Husain Committee he had

appointed did not recommend the scheme. Abdullah saw it as extending divide-and-rule to children.

In the context of this political friction of the previous few years, it is not surprising that in 1947 the lore that stuck in Muslim minds regarding Pandit attitudes was distasteful. The valley rippled with stories like the one about the Pandit who marched into a mosque in Delina village on the road from Baramula to Sopore, while the raiders were on the rampage, to burn his sacred thread and demand not only to be converted but also to be fed beef on the spot.

Some city Pandits provoked even the scion of the Dhar family, who was now among the National Conference's prominent leaders, to mutter foul abuse. For, having hailed Abdullah as an avatar of Krishna, they switched to slogans in praise of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru as soon as Indian soldiers arrived. Perhaps they were not the same Pandits who had sent Nehru envelopes stuffed with pubic hair just a year before—when he had been in Srinagar to argue as Abdullah's advocate.

Since the only Hindus that Kashmiri Muslims knew were Pandits, this cycle of mistrust and contempt was a bad augury for Kashmir's association with India. For, although India was built on the dream of inter-religious confraternity, it was projected in Kashmir as essentially Hindu.

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A few days after the Indian Army had beaten back the tribesmen from the edge of Srinagar, Mountbatten went home to London to attend the wedding of Elizabeth, the crown princess. The organ playing majestically and the choir's harmony swelling to fill the vast abbey must have soothed his jangled nerves. To a ear tuned to the ethereality of a single note held mezzo soprano through four bars, the syncopated rhythms of earthen drums or a muezzin's piercing call in minor key can sound raucous. And although Mountbatten no doubt enjoyed the pomp and pageantry of his job in India, the dinning polyphonies of the place must at times have jarred.

So too might India's notion of nation have seemed strange to him. The archbishop droning tunefully in the ancient church was the

overarching sanctifier of England's nationhood—State had mastered Church 400 years before so that a king could divorce his foreign wife. The new India, on the other hand, promised to embrace every race and creed that lived within it, taking to heart Rabindranath Tagore's vision of a nation that was not a fortress of ethnic exclusivity but an unceasing creator of integrative civilization. I seek my compatriots all over the world, the poet had said. Britain's Commonwealth Relations Office certainly understood Pakistan's idea of nationhood, predicated on religion, better than it did India's. 'It would have been natural for Kashmir to eventually have acceded to Pakistan,' it noted in a memorandum.

Not only was Pakistan's claim to a Muslim-majority area obvious to it, Britain appreciated Pakistan's concern that India could squeeze its jugular from Poonch and Mirpur in the south-west of Jammu and Kashmir, cheek by jowl with the arterial road from Lahore to Rawalpindi. Mountbatten had done what he could to give Pakistan leeway. Being chairman of the defence committee of the Indian cabinet gave him extraordinary leverage. And the British commanders of India's armed forces marched a fine line between copybook rectitude and sedition, working in tandem with the governor-general and the high commissioner. They ignored cabinet instructions to send the military supplies Hari Singh had requested to fight the Poonch insurgents. And they kept mum when their compatriots in Pakistan told them of the tribesmen's advance a couple of days before India's cabinet heard of it.

On the day India accepted the accession and dispatched troops, Nehru received a telegram. 'You must of course give serious consideration to an appeal from the Ruler of the State, but I beg of you not to let your answer to this appeal take the form of armed intervention,' Britain's Prime Minister Attlee cabled. Instead, he suggested to both dominions that they meet and sort things out. Jinnah promptly invited Mountbatten, Nehru, Hari Singh and the state's prime minister for a round table discussion with him and his prime minister. New Delhi would not hear of a tripartite meeting, as if the state was still a separate entity equidistant from India and Pakistan. Nehru was willing to go, despite illness and his colleagues' advice not to go 'crawling to Jinnah', but changed

his mind when Pakistan declared that the accession was based on fraud.

Mountbatten nevertheless set off alone on 1 November. Instead of demanding how the tribesmen got to the state, he handed Jinnah a signed blow-by-blow account from India's service chiefs (all British officers) to prove that India's troops had only got there after the accession. Then he suggested a plebiscite supervised by the United Nations, but Jinnah waved the idea aside with disdain. Nothing came of several meetings, inter-governmental telegrams and press statements that followed but Mountbatten kept doing what he could to give Pakistan a chance.

By the time he returned from the royal wedding on 24 November, however, he was shocked. He protested to Nehru that the government had switched the military strategy in the areas of the state closest to the heart of Pakistan from defensive to offensive. Instead of merely backing up the state forces in Mirpur and Poonch, as decided before he left, the Indian Army was fighting to control that area.

A taut tug of war ensued over the next month. The cabinet urged swift action to take Poonch and Mirpur, even aerial strafing of the bank of the river that divided the state from Pakistan in order to prevent infiltration, but the governor-general and service chiefs argued vehemently against air force action or ground offensives to the west. The Englishmen largely succeeded and a furious Nehru just about managed to stop them from evacuating a besieged garrison from Poonch town.

On 20 December, the air was charged when the defence committee of the cabinet met. There were long faces under the high walls and imposing sandstone columns of the imperial building. Nehru had just got to know that the army chief had done nothing when the vice-chief of Pakistan's army and a British official in Peshawar had telephoned him to say that hordes of tribesmen were on their way to Kashmir. The general had been told to resign. The cabinet was already in a foul temper ever since the deputy prime minister and the defence minister had returned from Jammu and Kashmir a fortnight earlier with horrifying stories of fresh tribal incursions and non-Muslim girls being carried off from Mirpur and parts of Poonch for sale in Lahore.

This could not go on, Nehru told the meeting. A war was being

waged on Indian territory and the forces' tactics had been apologetic. He had made up his mind that India must retaliate with a thrust into the heart of Pakistan. It was an option that three of his successors would consider but shy away from on at least five occasions during the 1990s. Although Nehru had argued against the idea when Abdullah first mooted it a week after the tribesmen's invasion, he was convinced by this time that it was the only way. The bases from which the aggressor was supplied must be destroyed, he said, and he wanted the committee to consider sending Indian troops into the Pakistani districts of Sialkot, Gujrat and Jhelum.

What Mountbatten had spent the past two months trying to prevent with all the skill, persuasion and subterfuge at his command loomed threateningly. He made a last Herculean effort to prevent his royal cousin's newest dominions from declaring war against each other, arguing as persuasively as he could that the best course would be to refer the whole matter to the United Nations. Nehru was weary by then of Mountbatten's relentless talk of the United Nations but not wary. He compromised: army headquarters would draw up plans for the invasion of Pakistani Punjab while the foreign office would lodge a complaint with the Security Council.

The complaint was sent on 1 January 1948 but the Englishmen in charge of army headquarters never drew up the attack plans Nehru had ordered. Through the next several months, Nehru must have felt like a driver pumping the accelerator furiously only to get his vehicle, its carburettor choked with muck, to lurch a reluctant yard or two and stall again. His British service chiefs continued to do all they could to subvert cabinet orders to clear the entire state of intruders.

In fact, led by its British commander, the garrison controlling Gilgit had raised the Pakistan flag in the first week of November 1947. The sprawling ice plateau around Gilgit was barely habitable but was still strategically vital. Indeed, if the British were behind Hari Singh's troubles in 1931, the motive would have been Gilgit: the empire began negotiations to lease Gilgit soon after its troops marched into Jammu. The lease, signed in 1935, was the reason the Gilgit garrison was in a position to determine history twelve years later.

In the spring of 1948, India won a nail-biting race to take hold of Buddhist Leh to the east of Gilgit. That feat was astounding. A band of forty-two soldiers crossed the 5,000-metre-high Zoji La on foot in

March, trekked through deep snow and ridges of ice to Leh and held it under siege till November. But those men had crossed that lethal pass without clearance from army headquarters. Their commander, Brigadier L.P. Sen, waved them on after being told by headquarters day after day in mid-March that his plan was under consideration.

India's new commander-in-chief, General Roy Bucher, was not actually considering any forward movement of the army. Research in London half a century later would reveal that during the very week in which those doughty soldiers pushed back the frontiers of possibility Bucher sat secretly in London with his Pakistani counterpart, also British, to carve up the state between the nations they were supposed to serve.

They managed to make their deal stick until a ceasefire agreement on 1 January 1949 tore the patchwork state between India and Pakistan more or less along the lines the two British generals had agreed.

As if two tectonic plates were in attrition there, Kashmir had willy-nilly become the fault line between the subcontinent's rival models of national identity—open-ended confraternity and monocultural, religion-based identity. That tectonic opposition overlapped the clash between the rival paradigms of identity that had ruptured the National Conference and the Muslim Conference. This clash, between mono-ethnic aspiration and mono-religious identity, would remain a fault line within Kashmir, complicating the larger subcontinental fault line.

The template of confraternity that India adopted was bound to be unstable, at least initially. For it was a new experiment on such a large scale. It was a gift of Gandhi's vision, at a time when most of the subcontinent was, like Ali Sheikh, not attuned at all to thinking in terms of identities as large as nations. So, it would repeatedly be challenged by the older templates of ethnicity, caste and religion—even though it inadvertently gave India a head start in the postmodern age of global travel, trade and communication for which this inclusive template is so well suited.

Kashmir's template too was unstable, for it was designed for a colonial rather than a postmodern age. Based on Kashmir's sense of superiority, it merely papered over the sectarian differences among

ethnic Kashmiris within the valley in order to dominate the rest
the state.

Despite appearances, this monocultural template was no
essentially Islamic. In Kashmir, it had been moulded by recent socio
economic history, which had given immense advantage to Pandits
Across the subcontinent, it represented an attempt to reach back in
fear to a comforting past, idealized in memory, rather than invest trust
to create a common future. And the template gained strength not
where Muslims dominated—in Punjab, Sind or the Pashtun area—
but in the Gangetic heartland, where the Muslim elite feared being
overwhelmed by the majority community.

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Geopolitics

As the sun began to set, a band of orange streamed across the lake to meet a rainbow of flowers that scampered down terraces amid fountains. A Mughal emperor had built the garden to rival heaven and Abdullah made sure it was at its best. He had finally been designated prime minister a few months earlier, in March 1948, and this was to be his grandest public reception.

He wanted to probe the minds of the five visitors, members of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan. A Security Council resolution had established it in April. The resolution had also called for Pakistani nationals to withdraw, Indian troops to be reduced to the minimum required to maintain order, an interim coalition government, and magisterial and military powers for a United Nations' administrator to conduct a plebiscite. The resolution had finally been passed after several other proposals had run aground. During those tortuous weeks, the British delegation—to which many others turned for advice about its former colony—had manoeuvred vigorously to push Pakistan's case.

Strategic objectives were sharply in Britain's mind. Its current goal was dark and greasy, and Pakistan was not only close to the Gulf, it was Muslim. For the sake of oil, as a minute from the Foreign Office to Prime Minister Attlee noted on 6 January 1948, Britain's paramount concern was not to alienate 'the whole of Islam' by appearing to side with India against Pakistan—more so as Britain reeled later that year from the consequences of bringing into being a second nation that claimed territory based on religion: Israel.

Pakistan had already turned the tables within two days of the Security Council taking up India's complaint. Denying any support to the tribesmen or to the Azad Kashmir (Free Kashmir) government—

which it had got the Poonch rebels to declare a couple of days aft the tribesmen entered the state—it counter-charged genocide agains Muslims. Pogroms had indeed taken place in both countries but global news being scanty in the 1940s, the horrifying one-sided picture that Pakistan painted diverted the council from India's complaint that Pakistan was behind the tribesmen's aggression. Pakistan's proposal that the United Nations send troops to take control of the area pending a plebiscite sounded sensible and it was in this mood that the commission had reached the subcontinent.

The Czechoslovak member, Josef Korbel, recorded how Abdullah took him aside during that reception at the Mughal garden to discuss options. After saying that neither India nor Pakistan would agree to his state acceding to the other, he pointed to problems inherent in the two other options: independence and permanent partition between India and Pakistan.

Perhaps Abdullah was probing Korbel's mind before showing his hand. The thrust towards independence had gathered steam when Nehru had sent him to address the Security Council on India's behalf in February 1948. Abdullah had used the opportunity to strategize with those in the Pakistani delegation who were sympathetic with his cause. An even more effective link was Pir Maqbool, the host of that meeting in the Round Room in 1931. His acolytes included senior Pakistan Army officers and he had unrivalled access to them since Abdullah had appointed him emergency administrator of Uri, the corner of the valley closest to Pakistan.

These efforts aimed at garnering support for the independence idea across the ceasefire line, not to conspire with the Pakistani government. If Abdullah wanted state backing, it was from much further west. His independence scheme was as ambivalent about global ideological battles as towards the rival notions of nation on the subcontinent. It had taken wing in the early 1940s under the aegis of the communists who put together his party's manifesto but, as Soviet Russia veered closer to Nehru, the US became Abdullah's great white hope. When he finally bared his heart, it was not to his cabinet, his party working committee or to the United Nations—and definitely not to his people. It was to the Western press and to US ambassador to India Loy Henderson, who visited Srinagar often with his wife.

On Kashmir, the US had begun like an aide of Britain at the United Nations but, within a year or so, the boot was on the other foot. In March 1949, the United Nations appointed an American admiral to conduct a plebiscite, thus giving the US leverage to try and add the option of independence to the ballot. In fact, the US and Britain together proposed that the admiral arbitrate between India and Pakistan on how to pave the way for a plebiscite—an idea that Nehru threw out with disdain.

Ambassador Henderson wrote to the State Department in the autumn of 1950:

> In discussing future Kashmir, Abdullah was vigorous in restating his opinion that it should be independent, that overwhelming majority of [the] population desired this independence, and that he had reason to believe that some Azad Kashmir leaders desired independence and would be willing to cooperate with leaders of [the] National Conference if there were reasonable chance such cooperation would result in independence.

In May 1949, Abdullah told Michael Davidson, the British correspondent of the *Observer* and the *Scotsman*:

> Accession to either side cannot bring peace. We want to live in friendship with both the Dominions. Perhaps a middle path between them, with economic cooperation with both, will be the only way of doing it. However, an independent Kashmir must be guaranteed not only by India and Pakistan but also by Britain, the US and other members of the UN.

In 1950, the United Nations replaced its moribund commission with a representative and gave him more powers—so that he might more flexibly suggest solutions. The first representative was Sir Owen Dixon, an Australian judge. Soon realizing that the nub of the problem was the valley, he recommended a plebiscite in just the valley and some adjoining areas while other parts of the state were absorbed into either country.

After both countries rejected his plan, Dixon told the Security Council it should give up trying to resolve the issue. But give up the US and the UK would not, riding as they were a wave of paranoia as communism bubbled up around them. Kashmir was a potential front line state in the nascent cold war. While Pakistan had signed on to contain the communist threat, Nehru appeared precariously pink. So the duo moved for a former US senator to take Dixon's place, and of course the Security Council passed the resolution. Pakistan accepted it but Nehru rejected it as 'a challenge to India's self-respect'.

The senator toiled patiently for years but Dixon had been right. He got nowhere.

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Nation-building is tough. Pakistan lurched along under a series of rulers after Jinnah died a little more than a year after independence. Nehru experimented with a mixed economy to try and cater to the disparate aspirations of the world's most diverse nation. Abdullah meanwhile virtually had a free hand to build a new Kashmir and he set about it with dynamism. The implementation of Naya Kashmir transformed Kashmir's villages. Under land ceiling laws, tillers got land without compensation and those who had held feudal sway lost not only economic but—at least as importantly in Kashmir—social clout. And those who had for centuries lived on daily doses of contempt became masters of their livelihoods.

Abdullah thus wrought far more radical change than Nehru, but perhaps gradual change is more stable. Abdullah took an autocratic path, convinced that he knew what was best for his people. His people were not docile cattle, though. So he had to grapple with resentment at home and outright antagonism in Jammu and Ladakh while he sought to manoeuvre his people out of India through a geopolitical minefield.

It was far too complex a challenge. Although the template on which Abdullah sought to build Kashmir's polity was essentially imperial, his people had imbibed no imperialist doctrine, like Nazi Germany or Samurai Japan, that might weld them into a disciplined phalanx. Kashmir's sense of superiority responded to that template but did not suborn individual aspirations to collective ones.

In fact, Abdullah's own determination to lead an independent nation was probably as much an individual aspiration as a collective one on behalf of his people. He knew it would let him win back their adulation, at least for a while. To make it succeed, he calculated that the US would infuse capital and that he could enforce discipline to turn it into another Switzerland. But Kashmir's mores had neither made it thrifty nor given it a work ethic. So Abdullah's determination to keep Kashmir's economy isolated while his people tightened their belts to build a brave new future was met with sullen resentment.

His popularity was on a see-saw. In the autumn of 1949, the new government abolished big landlords—only big ones at that stage, since some of the affluent communist leaders ensured that the ceiling on landownership was fixed relatively high, at 182 kanals. Over the next couple of years, people began to complain about the mujawada: the landlord's share may have been lopped but they still had to give a part to the state. Abdullah would not let the agricultural revenue go, for he was determined that his people should not be dependent on Indian grants. He did not explain that to them, though. So when he said '*Olu khow*', eat potatoes, instead of the much favoured rice, his people muttered darkly against him.

Major irrigation canal projects were initiated, the first one not far from Manigam. Nehru had come to inaugurate the construction, with Abdullah and Bakshi and other senior leaders. Ali Sheikh was delighted: as the mate in charge of a shift of labourers, he earned Rs 1.50 a day. That was more than double what any of the other available work paid, for Ali Sheikh had never studied beyond the class he had run away from to listen to Abdullah.

But those who did not benefit directly were less impressed. It did not matter to them that the leader shared every sacrifice. His prodigious appetite could polish off an entire sheep at a meal but he settled for ground corn in yoghurt for lunch at office. And he yelled at his wife if more than half a kilo of mutton was cooked at home for the family.

Kashmir had always been too focussed on self-interest to be impressed with exemplars. The hubristic temper that had enchanted Kashmir when it had been directed against the maharaja seemed terribly oppressive now. Boards on buses stated baldly that political discussion was banned, and anyone who tuned to Radio Pakistan was likely to be tortured. Distrustful even of colleagues, Abdullah threatened

to jail G.M. Rajpuri—who would later become assembly speaker—for refusing an appointment as emergency administrator. Although his biographer remained one of his greatest fans, he commented years later that Abdullah 'thought he is the party, that he is the nation unto himself'.

As a result, just a few hundred would turn out for Abdullah's public meetings and they generally looked surly, as if party factotums had dragged them there. Most often, they had—with promises and insinuated threats. It got steadily worse from 1949. Each time, local workers ardently trotted out explanations: it was the sowing season, or the harvest, or there was a flood, or an epidemic. But Abdullah knew that his people did not adore him as they once had. His readings from the Quran before every speech drew no tears now and the adulation that had made them reach for the dust he walked on, or kiss his shoes as they scrambled to help him put them on, was gone. So intense was Kashmir's angry sulk that when Abdullah went to inaugurate a canal that would turn the land around Shopian to gold, or the one from Budgam to Hajin that would transform an even larger area, no more than a couple of hundred people turned out.

Sopore upset him particularly. He had hoped that at least his bastion in the north district—many other parts of which had voted for the Muslim Conference during the 1940s—would remain steadfast. So he brusquely waved away a lanky boy who approached him with a piece of paper after he had given a speech there. Masoodi, standing dignified as usual a little behind the boss, beckoned the boy over. Despite his frayed clothes, straggly beard and worn slippers, Masoodi had glimpsed a hint of unusual character in his erect bearing. Telling him to come to the party headquarters, Masoodi signalled an aide to give the boy the fare.

A few days later, the boy turned up. Still in his teens, Ali Shah Geelani was earnest, intelligent and deeply pious. He wanted help to study further. His family claimed Syed descent, although they were poorly off: his father worked as a canal watchman. Masoodi arranged for him to stay at the party office and study for an honours degree in Urdu. Geelani would say decades later that Masoodi was like a father to him during the four years he stayed there. Having earned degrees in Urdu and Persian, he wrote for the party paper, *Khidmat*, before he got a teaching job at the school where Masoodi had once taught.

Among his colleagues was Karri Saifuddin, and Geelani too now learnt of the Jamaat. Karri and his brother-in-law Saduddin remained in tune with Kashmir's devotion to pirs, although they stopped short of superstitious rituals, but Geelani was more impressed with the Jamaat's puritanical stream, much closer to Wahhabi thought.

Masoodi, as erudite a scholar of Islam as the best of them, had the Jamaat's respect and some of them took to visiting him at the party headquarters. Pleased with any movement that would wean Kashmir away from superstition, he often sat out in the courtyard for hours to chat with them. The left flank of the party was antagonistic of course. Reforming the disease was not Marx's answer. And the Jamaat men annoyed Abdullah too whenever he found them there. They were far too dour for his liking and he knew most of them doted on Pakistan.

Distrust turned to hostility when Saduddin told Abdullah off. Abdullah had had it coming. He had kept the education portfolio after Masoodi had refused it, chuckling, '*Kissi ko to be-daag chhod do*'—leave someone unblemished. Abdullah decided one day to conduct interviews for two school principals himself. Perhaps he wanted imposing figures to inspire children on the sports field as well as in the classroom, for he simply picked out the tallest men among the applicants, all qualified, and told the rest to go. They meekly began to disperse but Saduddin, who was among them, rose to demand what height had to do with running a school. Abdullah and he got into a yelling match that ended with Saduddin resigning his government schoolteacher's job and becoming chief of a Jamaat-e-Islami for Jammu and Kashmir—separate from India's Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, and from the chapter in Azad Kashmir and the primary chapter, headed by Maududi, in Pakistan.

All the party leaders saw the Jamaat only as a doctrinal grouping, not as a socio-economic force. But the Jamaat drew many of the better-off urban or landowning classes that had lost out to land reforms. Deprived of feudal privileges, they adopted the primness, savings and professional respectability that this puritanical movement promoted. When the National Conference would run out of steam a quarter-century later, unable to satisfy the aspirations of the children

of those who had gained land, the Jamaat would be its most potent rival—the strongest representative in Kashmir of the monocultural, mono-religious alternative for nation-building.

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Soon after the hostilities between India and Pakistan ended, another tug of war began. It pitted Abdullah against those of Nehru's colleagues who saw Hari Singh's conditional accession as the thin edge of a wedge to gradually assimilate the state entirely into India. Abdullah, on the other hand, saw the conditional accession as an opening towards independence.

Abdullah rejected Ayyangar's suggestion that a referendum for the people to decide between India and Pakistan be held on the Indian side of the ceasefire line. He wanted a constituent assembly elected in order to decide the fate of the state. After a series of meetings, Nehru and Abdullah agreed in May 1949 that the state would have a separate constitution. Nehru may have thought the state constituent assembly would enhance the terms of accession—since Hari Singh had created a legal impediment through a caveat that the terms of his accession could only be varied through a supplementary instrument. Abdullah on the other hand probably thought a constituent assembly could reduce, if not reverse, the terms of Hari Singh's accession.

In October 1949 he began to pave the way for that. Drafting of the Indian constitution had almost been completed when, while Nehru was away in London, Abdullah made it clear that it was not acceptable. Sitting coldly erect on a deep sofa set behind the vast marble pillars around the assembly hall over which a vast Renaissance ceiling soared concave, he gravely told the man sitting opposite him that he and his three companions from Jammu and Kashmir would not sign.

His companion, Gopalasami Ayyangar, now minister for states in Nehru's government, had piloted the drafts of some of the more difficult clauses on the prickly relationship between the Union and the states. He had been Hari Singh's prime minister and had presented India's case to the Security Council in 1948. So he understood the import of what Abdullah had just said better than almost anyone else could.

When Nehru was telegraphed at sea, he immediately cabled a reply asking Ayyangar to give Abdullah what he wanted. It was a logical corollary to the separate constituent assembly for the state which he had already agreed to. And so it was that a hurriedly drafted Article 370 was added, empowering the state government to veto the applicability of any Union law or article of the Indian constitution to the state. All state government decisions regarding applicability of laws were to be ratified by the state constituent assembly.

By the time a constituent assembly was elected a couple of years later, Michael James, special correspondent of the *New York Times*, wrote on 1 November 1951 after an interview with Abdullah: 'Hints have been made that once the Constituent Assembly begins to function, there is a possibility of creating an opposition to accession to India.'

Abdullah was evidently talking of a popular independence movement. Yet, when elections for the constituent assembly were held, he made sure that hardly a vote was cast. Election officials picked holes in the nomination papers of thirteen candidates of the Praja Parishad, the main Hindu-dominated party in the Jammu region. Finally, with its boycott, the Praja Parishad—which had evolved largely from the Rajya Hindu Sabha—cleared the way for Abdullah's nominees.

In the valley, in all but two constituencies, no candidate stood against the National Conference and soon both the independent candidates withdrew. A few nights before election day, Sofi had driven one of them, Shiv Narayan Fotedar, for a two-hour post-dinner chat with Masoodi. Fotedar was later nominated to, and elected chairman of, the upper house of the state legislature. If Abdullah's constituent assembly was to declare independence, there would be no opposition voices. Not one. He consolidated himself in the cabinet too, dropping senior leaders who might stand up to him—even Mohiuddin Qara, the most popular leader after Abdullah since he had worked tirelessly underground in 1946 when his colleagues were either in jail or in exile.

Abdullah's campaign speeches and the party manifesto for the constituent assembly elections focussed mainly on the abolition of monarchy and land reforms—though a final decision on accession was also spoken of. Land reforms had already begun two years earlier. It was the abolition of monarchy that was on top of Abdullah's priority list. Within three weeks of its first meeting at the end of October 1951,

the constituent assembly passed a resolution seeking the deposition and exile of the maharaja. The defeated man had already handed his son the brassy trimmings of his reins and retired to Bombay. But that was not enough. Abdullah did not want twenty-year-old Karan Singh to continue as regent, but to be elected instead as *sadr-e-riyasat*, head of state. That became his chief priority.

Karan Singh preferred to wait until the constituent assembly had delineated the powers and responsibilities of the head of state, but Abdullah was adamant: he wanted the change right away. One can only speculate upon his reasons. Perhaps he thought that the regent could withdraw the maharaja's order appointing him as prime minister, or refuse to accept the decisions of the constituent assembly. As an officer elected by that assembly, the head of state would find that far more difficult.

Armed with a resolution to unseat the maharaja passed by an assembly he had handpicked, Abdullah marched to Delhi for talks on the relationship between the state and the Union of India. Mir Qasim, a member of this three-member delegation, recalled decades later, 'We had gone to have the maharaja removed.' The Union had no objection to the titles prime minister and head of state, but wanted to appoint the latter as it appointed the governors of other states. Abdullah insisted it had to be an elected post.

His anti-monarchist demand was posited as populist, even democratic. The spirit of that argument should logically have either led to the merger of the state into the Republic of India or to freedom for each conquered portion of the Dogra kingdom to chart its own future. Abdullah wanted to get rid of the Dogra dynasty but not the entity of Jammu and Kashmir, even though the state had no historical, cultural, ethnic or linguistic unity before the East India Company decided to sell some conquered property to the Dogras.

Delhi nevertheless gave in on his terms and turned to the issues it considered more important—the mechanics of the special relationship between the state and the Union mandated by Article 370 of the Indian constitution. The Union agreed that the Supreme Court of India would have only limited jurisdiction in the state and the Election Commission of India would only conduct elections if specifically requested. But, the Union team argued, if the state wanted

Union grants, the comptroller and auditor general must vet its accounts. This caused a stalemate. They were not beggars, Abdullah expostulated, that they would allow accounts to be checked.

The Union team was led by Maulana Azad, who had presided over the Congress party from 1940 to 1946 and was now Nehru's education minister. Azad, who preferred Jasmine tea to the English tea they were regularly served, complained to Nehru when the latter joined them one day that Abdullah had not budged an inch through nine rounds—three of tea, three of milk and three of sugar.

Ayyangar was part of the team. Taking Abdullah gently aside, he told him that he was being given as much as he was only because Nehru was around. Later, he would not get even this. But, implacable, Abdullah had his way. The state's team even argued against the Union's power to delimit cantonments, over which the army had supervening control. The entire state might be declared a cantonment, argued Abdullah's advisers. So, in Jammu and Kashmir, the Union's power was limited to the administration of cantonments.

It was the closest thing to independence Nehru could possibly have given his friend. Nehru had even persuaded Karan Singh to accept a change of status and become sadr-e-riyasat. But Nehru's flexibility had evidently not been part of Abdullah's script. Abdullah refused for a while to sign the agreement. He was only forced to sign after the large majority of his handpicked constituent assembly approved it.

Ironically, the impasse between Nehru and Abdullah—reached against the backdrop of the one between India and Pakistan—climaxed at an ox fight in September 1952. Neither of the oxen would yield. No doubt, one first pushed the other back a couple of steps before, holding its ground, the other heaved forward. At times, one or other would have broken off to barrel away, pounding the earth and raising clouds of dust as the other chased in a flaming burst of testosterone. Snorting, they must have locked horns then, till their heaving flanks sweated. When one ox finally drew blood, goring the other's flank, the audience burst into applause. Most of them nomadic shepherds, Gujjars and Backerwals, they had sat silently till then, according to Sofi, who was

an eyewitness, overawed by the guests under the canopy. The ox fight was a special treat organized by their pir, Mian Nizamuddin, who was basking in his role of host to two prime ministers—Nehru and Abdullah.

Nehru had been fidgeting uncomfortably since the beginning. He despised blood sport but, not wanting to offend, had sat frowning for a while. Finally, he had turned to the Gujjar pir and suggested that the spectacle be put off for the moment. It was his last morning at lovely Sonamarg and he had so much to do, he explained with urbane charm.

The fight was immediately stopped and Nehru asked the party's seniormost leaders to join him in his cabin. He had gone to Sonamarg, the meadow below the glacier that led to Ladakh, to try and ease the rancour that had been building between Abdullah and him. Discussions had got nowhere over the past couple of days and the leaders trickled uneasily into Nehru's cabin after the ox fight: Abdullah, Bakshi and Masoodi with Afzal Beg, the minister closest to Abdullah, and Sham Lal Saraf, the sole Pandit minister.

In that log cabin, Nehru asked them bluntly what they wanted. Bakshi and Saraf said they were committed to India. Abdullah and Beg expressed misgivings. Nehru then turned to Masoodi, but all he would say was that whatever they decided should be unanimous. The meeting was fruitless.

The tension between the two prime ministers had emerged subtly at first. When Nehru went to attend another National Conference meeting, this one a formal working committee session, at the Spring of Emperors above the Dal, Abdullah halted the meeting at one point for afternoon prayers. Nehru said that those who wanted to pray could go with Sheikh sahib but those who preferred a cup of tea could stay back with him. Decades later Mir Qasim would recall that only two or three members went with Abdullah.

Nehru made his reservations public in a speech to inaugurate the little island Abdullah had built at the mouth of the Dal lake in Srinagar, where a channel joined it to the river. Nehru Park, the island was to be called. Nehru announced at the inauguration that he had had no idea the park was to be named after him and added dryly that he hoped he would be permitted to visit it.

As tension mounted during those meetings, the two prime ministers bared their knuckles behind closed doors. At one point, Nehru told Abdullah that he was willing to shake hands with three fingers but not to let go. At another point, he declared that he would present Kashmir to Pakistan on a golden platter rather than let Abdullah have what he wanted. Abdullah replied that Nehru would then confront Sheikh Abdullah, not the prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

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By May 1953, sections of the governments in both Delhi and Srinagar had made up their minds that Bakshi should be installed in Abdullah's place. Since Nehru was still reluctant, Maulana Azad went to Kashmir on a last-ditch mission at rapprochement.

Soon after he arrived, he was treated to unseemly noise outside his cottage at the Spring of Emperors: raucous laughter, giggles, clinking glasses. Seven young men and several girls had tumbled onto the lawns near the cottage and the noise of merry-making did not stop even well past his bedtime. It got on Maulana Azad's nerves. His illness had been exaggerated to give him an excuse to visit Kashmir but he was actually in pain from an injured arm.

The state's deputy home minister—a scion of the Dhar family—had organized that provocative party and no doubt his purpose was, in classic Kashmiri fashion, double-edged. Azad's irritation would please Abdullah, and it would dampen the peace mission. Dhar was also a leading tactician of the group that wanted Bakshi to take Abdullah's place.

Azad was still smarting when Masoodi came for tea the next afternoon. Masoodi empathized, for they were perfectly matched. Not only did each sport a neat pointed beard over a dark achkan and churidar, each could argue the nuances of Islamic doctrine. But Masoodi's mind was more attuned than the older man's to Kashmir's petty ways. It was obvious to him that such lewd behaviour so close to a cottage for state guests had been calculated. He mentioned the incident to Abdullah but that only led to the man who had organized the party being told to investigate.

Cocooned in hubris, Abdullah was sure the mood of nationalist defiance he had induced in Kashmir against the Union government would prevent him being replaced. He was in no mood to respond to

Azad's overtures. The pettiness went on. On the morning of Id, a striking yellow Plymouth slid to a halt at the edge of the vast prayer ground. A black Chevrolet followed, and Masoodi's wine red 1014 Ford, but Masoodi emerged from the Plymouth, along with Azad. The splendid chocolate brown Zephyr Lincoln, requisitioned from the maharaja's fleet for Abdullah's use, also arrived, and Azad, Abdullah and Masoodi walked together to the head of the congregation.

After prayers, Masoodi rose to announce ponderously that Abdullah would speak. Abdullah focussed on New Delhi's mistreatment of Kashmir, throwing a good deal of Urdu into his Kashmiri, so that Azad could follow. They only wanted jobs, he said, but there was a conspiracy to keep them out of work. In conclusion, Abdullah told the mammoth congregation that Azad was there from Delhi and would now address the crowd. He gave Masoodi no opportunity to introduce his scholarship. Over the next few minutes, party factotums set up a din, talking loudly, leaping over others and shouting to friends. Azad tried valiantly to speak while Abdullah sat unmoved. Azad was forced to wind up more quickly than he would have liked.

Taking Masoodi aside by the elbow when they were leaving, Azad asked him gravely to join him for lunch. But Masoodi said his colleagues would expect him at party headquarters. Undeterred, Azad asked him to come for dinner. They spoke that night for a couple of hours. On the way back, Masoodi turned to Sofi, who was driving. '*Sheikh Abdullah gaya. Yeh bachaane aaya tha, par bewakuf gaya*,' he said heavily. Sheikh Abdullah would go. Azad had come to save him but there was no hope for the fool now.

The tension that had mounted through the previous winter, as the two prime ministers faced off, had reached breaking point. Although those who wanted Abdullah replaced had no clinching evidence of what he was up to, they were sure he was moving towards secession. It later turned out that they were right. The reason the 1952 agreement did not satisfy Abdullah was that mastery of Azad Kashmir and untrammelled control of the portions he already had seemed possible with US help. To push the possibility, he had met the US Secretary of State, Adlai Stevenson, the previous winter. He had not accounted for the new superpower's ideological concerns, however. Already in the throes of McCarthy-ite paranoia, the US was repelled by Abdullah's communist policies. It preferred a leader from the

feudal classes. Ghulam Ahmed Asahi, who had remained one of Abdullah's chief advisers since the Reading Room Party days, got the impression that Stevenson told Abdullah that the US would push India and Pakistan to give Kashmir independence—if Abdullah gave up power first.

Abdullah would have no such thing. But nor would he give up his dream. The goal he had been working towards seemed too close to give up now. He looked for props to strengthen his grip on his people's minds. Although he was pulling away from both India and Pakistan, he grabbed Islam as his bludgeon. His rhetoric peaked at Ranbirsinghpura, close to the Pakistan border, in April 1953. He railed against India's Hindu bigotry, saying he had committed a crime against the Quran and feared for his people's future after Nehru was gone.

The reactions that his rhetoric caused in Hindu-dominated Jammu and Buddhist Ladakh was presented in Kashmir as proof of what he had said, and paranoia turned in a vicious cycle. Those regions had already been chafing at the valley's ascendance. Having begun with almost a score in 1948, Abdullah had retained only four other cabinet ministers after the autumn of 1951; three of them—Deputy Prime Minister Bakshi, Beg and Pandit Saraf—were from Kashmir, although half the state's population on the Indian side of the ceasefire line lived in the other two regions.

Rallying under the banner of Hindu chauvinism, Jammu burst into riot every few days through the winter of 1952–53. When Abdullah set up an immigration check post on the road from Delhi, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, who had recently left Nehru's cabinet to set up a right-wing party, took up cudgels. Insisting on his right to travel anywhere in India, he strode across the state border without a permit—and was promptly jailed. When he died in prison, resentment spread across India, but Abdullah was undaunted. Men like Ali Sheikh got the impression from party activists that Mookerjee had been Nehru's right hand, sent by him to undermine Kashmir's special status.

The stage thus set, the National Conference working committee discussed Kashmir's options for twenty-one days, starting soon after Azad's visit, but only Sadiq and Masoodi had the temerity to confront Abdullah. Ignoring them, he struck out sharply on 7 August, directing Saraf, the lone Pandit in his cabinet, to resign. Saraf refused.

The confrontation was now as sharp as a wolf-tooth.

The next morning, Bakshi, Saraf and Girdhari Lal Dogra—three of the five in the cabinet—wrote to Abdullah.

> After convening of the Constituent Assembly, certain inescapable elaborations of the State's relationship with India were defined in the Delhi Agreement, of which you were the chief architect on our behalf. Your stand was unanimously endorsed by the Government, the National Conference, the Indian Parliament and the Constituent Assembly of the State. But you have not only deliberately delayed the implementation of the Agreements on these matters, which form the sheet-anchor of our policy, but have purposefully and openly denounced these in public. You have thus arbitrarily sought to precipitate a rupture in the relationship of the State with India . . . It is, therefore, with great pain that we have to inform you of our conclusion that the Cabinet, constituted as it is at present and lacking as it does the unity of purpose and action, has lost the confidence of the people in its ability to give them a clean, efficient and healthy administration.

They sent a copy to the head of state (Karan Singh had been elected to the post by the constituent assembly), with whom they had been discussing tactics since at least the previous day.

So cocooned in hubris was Abdullah even at this stage, however, that he and his wife got into the Lincoln Zephyr that afternoon and set off to spend the weekend at Tangmarg, a favourite mountain retreat since the days when his father-in-law had lived there. He thus vacated the stage for his opponents to depose him. Bakshi told the sadr-e-riyasat he would not take charge unless Abdullah was first detained. That evening a convoy of vehicles set off for Tangmarg. When they reached after dark, Abdullah was not there. So its occupants trudged on to Gulmarg through sleet and slush, getting to the rest house where Abdullah was sleeping at one in the morning.

The superintendent of police lined up his men in the dark before entering the house along with the sadr-e-riyasat's ADC. They had to knock on the bedroom door for some time before a groggy and irritated Abdullah came out to yell at them for waking him. The ADC saluted and handed him a letter from the head of state, dismissing the council of ministers. Bellowing that the letter could have waited until morning, Abdullah tried to slam the door but the superintendent held it open. He too had a document to deliver—a warrant for Abdullah's arrest. Livid now, Abdullah argued with the police officer for several hours, with only his personal secretary there with them. When the officer suggested that Abdullah write to Nehru from Udhampur, the town not far from Jammu where he was to be taken, Abdullah shouted that his dead body would leave Kashmir. The officer replied that he had ropes and handcuffs and 300 men.

Finally, when the officer was returning from the toilet at 6 a.m., Abdullah's secretary told him in the corridor that his boss was ready to go.

An extraordinary era had already ended. Bakshi had taken the oath of office at dawn. He was now the prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

{8}

Development

Four days after Abdullah's arrest, Mir Qasim stood in the state prime minister's office and watched a glass dropping from Bakshi's hand. In Bakshi's other hand was a telephone and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, one of Nehru's ministers, had just asked him who had been to visit Abdullah in jail.

Nehru, who had only been told that Abdullah was to be replaced, not arrested, had stormed furiously into Kidwai's house on the morning of the arrest, yelling foul abuse. Kidwai, one of the ministers who had okayed the arrest, had been a friend long enough to wave India's prime minister to a chair and tell him tartly that he did not know politics. But Nehru was not easily mollified. Assurances that Abdullah was comfortably lodged at Tara Niwas palace in salubrious Udhampur cut little ice and the phone lines crackled with his anger a few days later. He had heard there was no toilet paper at the palace–jail.

Bakshi must have felt pinned between a rock and a hard place. For, while Nehru was rooting for Abdullah, Kashmir too was up in arms. Resentment against Abdullah the ruler had given way over the past few months to enchantment with Abdullah the challenger, taking on the might of a suzerain based beyond the valley with breathtaking hyperbole—just as he had with the Quit Kashmir agitation. So he ignited an explosion the day he was arrested as intense as when he had first been arrested in 1931. The city erupted as a convoy whisked him through, and knots of people braved batons and bullets for weeks, even after scores had been killed.

His people's devotion, as much as Nehru's solicitousness, ensured that Abdullah remained in play politically. After a while, he was shifted to Srinagar's Badami Bagh cantonment. There, under the indulgent eye of the commander—Colonel Adalat Khan who had argued with

Abdullah against inviting the Indian Army—the grocer passed messages to him. And Nehru's emissaries called on Abdullah's wife even after she and her associates had formed a 'war council' that urged Bakshi's assassination in posters and graffiti.

Nothing came of those visits. (One was scotched by the prattling of Abdullah's little son Tariq: when the emissary asked solicitously about Abdullah's plans, Tariq piped up to remind mummy that father had said he would hang this entire gang when he got out of jail.) In a few months, Abdullah's wife, who was by then receiving messages and money from Pakistan, was able to sail past his jailors with letters tucked into her clothes.

Mirza Afzal Beg was released in November 1954 owing to poor health and that was the beginning of Abdullah's political revival. Beg repackaged the war council as a Plebiscite Front on the second anniversary of Abdullah's detention. Some of Kashmir's most prosperous families led it and such disparate groups as the rump of the Muslim Conference, Bazaz's Kisan Mazdoor Sangh, the Ahle-tashia, the Ahle-hadis and the Jamaat-e-Islami got involved. Many of the front's leaders, including Beg, had been landlords before Abdullah's reforms. The puritans were equally reactionary, only their conservatism was predicated on the ideology that religion should control the state. That is how Maududi's doctrines were evolving in Pakistan.

After several rounds of discussion could forge no consensus on their common objective, they settled ironically on a Marxian formulation: 'the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri people'. That would remain the euphemism for Kashmir's ambiguous aspirations for decades. The new platform was Abdullah's front but he was never a member. It floated tantalizing bubbles but did not say what destiny should flow from a plebiscite. Its prime movers certainly did not want the two-option plebiscite envisaged by the Security Council's 1948 resolution.

Kashmir nevertheless embraced the front, revelling in the ambivalence even of masks, so long as it held the promise of advancing the community's nebulous notions of superiority. Kashmir's fractured mind never asked what the front's leading lights thought of individual peasants' newfound land titles, social egality or economic opportunities. Those gains evidently pleased Kashmir, though. For, after the first few weeks following Abdullah's arrest, it settled down to relative calm.

Bakshi's early managerial promise turned out to have been just the tip of an iceberg of resourcefulness.

Within days of Abdullah's arrest, Bakshi's backers held a convention, gathering a couple of thousand of the party cadre—including several from Jammu and Ladakh—on the ground where naked men had been whipped twenty-two years before. Demonstrators marched the streets, yelling, '*Kashmir Korea nahin banega. Saamraji adda nahin banega*'. Kashmir would not become Korea or a den of imperialism. Soon, hired hoodlums, disparaged as *pandah-kuntro* for their monthly pay packet of twenty-nine rupees and fifteen annas (one anna being deducted for a revenue stamp), imposed Bakshi's rule in tandem with zealous police officers. The mercenary militia's title: the Peace Brigade. A vast camp of luxury sprang up a stone's throw from the polo ground, well stocked with liquor and tended by master chefs. Members of the constituent assembly were fêted there for weeks, made to stay day and night, until they passed a vote of confidence for Bakshi.

Once he settled into power, Bakshi continued land reforms, reducing the ceiling gradually. Not only did he take forward Abdullah's grand vision of a new Kashmir, he moulded it with the focus of a juggler and the energy of a beaver. When landslides closed the road to Jammu, he was at the tarmac to assess the emergencies of those clamouring for a seat on the flight out. When he wanted to extend a road—which he named after Maulana Azad—through the warren of slums between Maisuma and the plaza that was now called Lal Chowk (Red Square), he hiked through the slum with bundles of currency piled on a blanket stretched between aides. At each home, he asked how much cash would compensate for the site, invariably doling out more than what the overawed householder had suggested. When an irate crowd pelted stones at a crew trying to build a road over a grave, a car glided up and Bakshi emerged to say effusively that this was the grave of a saint who could work miracles—before suggesting that they all pray to him to bend his knees a little. When he climbed a dais before a crowd of thousands, he would hail a villager in the distance by name, asking if his son had passed the matriculation exam and instructing him to bring the boy to him the next day for a job.

His social welfare programme was subjective but effective. Every month, Manmohan Wazir, the superintendent of police who held secret funds for intelligence, drove to Bakshi's house for him to dictate changes

in the list of widows and orphans in distant villages and the sums each was to be given that month. He would sometimes take a widow off the list, telling the officer her son had been hired in government.

Bakshi built a strong infrastructural frame for socio-economic transformation. Ali Sheikh went to Bakshi's house one morning with the headmen of several neighbouring villages to join the throng of early morning petitioners on the lawns. Although they were near the back, Bakshi spotted them as loyal party workers. Calling them over, he greeted them warmly and sent for tea and sweet steaming halwa before asking what they wanted. When they said there was no water in their fields or electricity in their homes, he remarked that they could eat in the dark if their fields had water. He would give them irrigation now, electricity after two years. Summoning the relevant officers, he gave orders. When an officer pleaded that there was no money, Bakshi abused him roundly and stated the exact amount that remained in the budget for that department. When the group returned the next year, Bakshi spoke before they could: electricity would be connected to the area around Manigam by the end of that year. It was—a year before he had initially promised.

On a visit to Delhi towards the end of the decade, he called on Humayun Kabir, Azad's successor as India's education minister. While Kabir was answering a telephone call, Bakshi's eye fell on a file regarding the establishment of seventeen new Regional Engineering Colleges across the country. By the time the telephone call was over, Bakshi had turned from courteous caller to agitator. He did not leave that office until Kabir had agreed, after resisting as long as he could, to shift the location of one of these colleges from Chandigarh to Srinagar. Bakshi pulled in more and more grants from Delhi, building roads, hospitals and schools that would remain Kashmir's patrimony for the rest of the century. And he used those grants to subsidize food and provide free education for all, right up to postgraduation.

Bakshi's most valuable legacy was not his skilled fund-raising or wise spending, however: he fashioned a social revolution more effectively than any left ideologue, whisking a boy from a despised caste into a prestigious profession whenever he could. Once, while he was visiting the vicinity of Manigam, a baker from a nearby village led his son forward, saying the boy had passed the high school exams and needed a job. Neighbours repressed snickers for, having over

centuries built society with the slimy bricks of contempt, Kashmir slighted bakers, boatmen, ironsmiths, milkmen, millers, gardeners, potters, barbers and other such castes. But Bakshi instructed his officers to give the boy a scholarship to study medicine. That baker's son, Dr Mohammed Abdullah Sofi, would practise in England before becoming physician to the royal house of Saud.

Land reforms had begun to extinguish Kashmir's kaleidoscopic hierarchies. Bakshi's subjective social interventions pushed the process further—and, as long as he ruled, his often ruthless Peace Brigade prevented a reaction. It hepled too that he lulled Kashmir with goodies, so that it did not notice how radically it was being changed. He would explicitly urge his people to enjoy themselves. When else will you enjoy life if not now, he would ask from public platforms.

Indeed, not since Bud Shah, the Great King Zainulabedin, five centuries before had Kashmir cavorted so. Buoyed in the early years of his reign by Kashmir's patron saint, Bud Shah had built rest houses, roads and canals, regulated prices, reformed prisons and courts, funded astronomers and doctors, mastered Sanskrit and Yogavashishtha and taught the Atharvaveda in state schools. His first prime minister was Buddhist, his chief justice Hindu. His multi-storeyed palace was a fifteenth-century wonder and cuisine and handicraft skills imported from Persia were honed to excellence during the five decades of his reign.

It was no mean compliment then that some called Bakshi *Bud Shah sani*, the Second Great King. Even Abdullah would later tell his biographer that Bakshi was the sort of extraordinary person who is born once a century. And Abbas Ansari, one of the leaders of a movement to sever Kashmir's ties with India, would point out in the next century that soldiers had to guard Abdullah's resplendent lakeside grave day and night against Kashmir's wrath but passing Kashmiris routinely paused to offer a prayer at Bakshi's unguarded grave tucked in the folds of Srinagar's inner city (Abdullah having prevented his burial next to the Jamia).

In calling Bakshi Bud Shah sani, however, Kashmir displayed a subject's gratitude rather than a citizen's approval. The shift from an agrarian, virtually slave-driven economy was too recent for the mass of individual Kashmiris to have developed the gumption to hold their leaders to account—or to formulate, leave alone express,

aspirations regarding socio-economic structures. Since it viewed the government and its challengers as rival harbingers of largesse, Kashmir secretly preferred the Utopian possibilities that the Plebiscite Front's unelucidated independence offered—even though the front was run by those who despised land reforms and the socialist principles on which economic change had been founded. Abdullah was perceived as messiah, Bakshi as usurper.

Bakshi was partly responsible. He did not inculcate the idea that the social contract is a two-way street but consciously created a system of patronage, in which he was the key to largesse. Abdullah too had liked his people to worship him as a messiah but, in those unstable early years, he had done far more to try and yoke social entropy to achieve economic goals. Even Abdullah had failed, though, to get Kashmir to batten down as a cohesive community, to save capital, build assets or add economic value for the long term. It was an insular society but each individual's goals remained personal.

Kashmiris would later hold against Bakshi the corruption that flourished when he told them to enjoy themselves but Bakshi had not conjured corruption, only given it free rein. Long before Bakshi, Kashmir's rituals-for-favours religiosity and ambivalent nature had made its backbone supple. In a land where apples and apricots, almonds and walnuts fell in heaps to rot where they lay, forbidden fruit was tastiest. Restraint was no firmer than apricot peal, rules like cherry seeds, to be gnawed and spit out. Even during Dogra rule, a matchmaker for a petty government employee would ask eagerly about the groom's 'upper income'. All Bakshi had done was to harness Kashmir's nature as political strategy.

Sadiq was one of the few who were genuinely appalled at the enveloping sleaze, but many of those who supported his opposition to Bakshi were looking for individual advantage. They focussed on corruption as their issue when they split the party in 1957 to form the Democratic National Conference but their real reason was panic. When Bakshi organized elections that year for the state assembly that the constituent assembly had mandated, it was again a virtual one-party show. As if that was not enough, Bakshi also ensured that many of the party's candidates who were close to Sadiq were not declared elected. Fearing that Bakshi would now leave their tallest leaders out of the cabinet, the way Abdullah had dropped such

stalwarts as Budh Singh and Qara in 1951, the faction led by Sadiq hurriedly split the party.

Sadiq knew he lacked ground support and, as he had grown more uncomfortable in the shadow of Bakshi's growing clout, had turned increasingly back to Kashmir's only leader taller than Bakshi. Since at least the beginning of 1956, he pressed for Abdullah's release. Bakshi resisted for a while but when he realized that the Democratic National Conference was trying to persuade Nehru to engage Abdullah in dialogue—hoping no doubt that Abdullah would adopt them—Bakshi flicked their trump. He suddenly released Abdullah in January 1958.

Kashmir gave Abdullah a rousing welcome but several thousands also marched through slush, sometimes a foot deep, under rain and snow, fifteen days after that startling release to hear Bakshi tell them that India's Republic Day was sacred. He had brought out the mirwaiz's 'goats' for the procession, shrewdly calculating that their abhorrence of Abdullah exceeded their love for Pakistan.

Abdullah made his most important speech a few weeks later at Hazratbal, the shrine that housed a relic of the Prophet of Islam. The grounds around that shrine had become his main platform since the 1930s. Beginning with a recitation from the Quran, Abdullah went on to list four possible solutions: plebiscite in the entire state, independence, an autonomous state for which India and Pakistan jointly managed defence and foreign relations, or the Dixon Plan. The mammoth meeting waited spellbound for him to name his preference but he said no more than Kashmir could not develop until India and Pakistan together reached an agreement, giving the Kashmiri people a decisive say. It was the first time a trilateral device had been suggested since Jinnah had invited Nehru and Hari Singh to Karachi a week after the tribesmen had swept in to Kashmir.

After Abdullah left, his workers engineered violence in which a worker loyal to Bakshi was killed. That led to a case against Masoodi and 106 associates. Another case, involving a bomb explosion, was registered against Qara and more than forty workers. Both Masoodi and Qara were helping the Plebiscite Front, though they were not members. The main case, for conspiracy against the nation, continued to build against Abdullah. The Intelligence Bureau, which had had no evidence in 1953, had obtained details of the monetary and other aid Pakistan had sent while Abdullah was in jail.

Having shown that Abdullah's presence spelt trouble—and did not bring the heavens down—Bakshi made a deal with India's home minister, G.B. Pant, behind Nehru's back: he would allow the state's accounts to be audited by the comptroller and auditor general of India if Abdullah could be bundled back to jail. The Sadiq faction was left scrambling to get past Bakshi's security set-up to reach Nehru. Mir Qasim was smuggled out to New Delhi but Nehru told him he had only heard of the re-arrest when his flight from Kerala to Delhi had stopped to refuel in Nagpur. 'I don't like certain things that Bakshi does,' Nehru had said, then added after a pause, 'I don't like anything Bakshi does.'

Despite his distaste for Bakshi's style, Nehru thought that fortifying Bakshi to face international pressures and the Plebiscite Front was a safer bet than the vicissitudes of democracy in Kashmir. He went to Srinagar to persuade Sadiq's faction to rejoin Bakshi. Balraj Puri, who would lead the state unit of the Praja Socialist Party soon after, remembered Nehru saying in his presence: '*Chavani ke faide ke liye rupai ka nuksaan na ho jaaye*,' a quarter's gain is not worth risking a rupee's loss. Even when tales of the freewheeling indulgence in Kashmir were carried to him, highly exaggerated in the telling, Nehru stood by Bakshi.

In pushing the Sadiq faction to reunite, Nehru erred on the side of caution. It was a great opportunity to establish multi-party democracy in Kashmir, Abdullah and Bakshi having both proved essentially dictatorial. The ideological differences between the liberal conservative Bakshi and the communist Sadiq made the split logical too. As things stood, there was no opposition alternative worth the name in Kashmir. Not only that, had another party taken root, Nehru would have found the going much easier when in 1963 he decided to replace Bakshi. Nehru was frail by then, his face lined, his hair snow-white. A drubbing by China on India's eastern border at the end of 1962 had broken his spirit and made him aware of mortality. He had never reconciled to leaving Abdullah languishing in prison and he wanted the Kashmir question resolved before he died.

The war with China had made India's vulnerability over Kashmir more evident than ever before. Not only had India been shamefully exposed to Pakistan while China was battering it, China had at the end of that war kept the eastern portions of the state adjoining Tibet.

And on 2 March 1963, within weeks of a brilliant strategist called Zulfikar Ali Bhutto becoming its foreign minister, Pakistan had also ceded Aksai Chin to China, the northern areas over which a dispute with China had continued since the previous century. So eager was Pakistan to cosy up to India's opponents that it not only gave away strategic territory but also installed China as its new patron—and became the pivot of a Sino–US axis.

Since the Soviet Union would not help India against communist China, Nehru was forced to turn to the US and the UK for arms during the Chinese aggression and the duo had told India it must come to an agreement acceptable to Pakistan on Kashmir. Nehru sent Swaran Singh, his foreign minister, to engage Bhutto in six rounds of talks from the end of December 1962 to May 1963. India offered to divide the state during the second round of those talks but nothing came of it as both sides upped the ante in later rounds. Abbas Ansari heard that Abdullah sent a message during the sixth round that he could give them a solution that accommodated all three. If that is true, Abdullah was not taken seriously.

As for Bakshi, it was not the geopolitical consequences of the 1962 war but its domestic political impact that affected his career. Nehru's keen democratic sensibility had allowed him to hold an ideologically disparate party together. He had let large parts of the social democrat and liberal conservative streams of Indian politics flow within the Congress, allowing conservatives with a grip on various states to rule their regions even though his romantic mind leaned towards socialism. But that era of federal political accommodation ended in 1963. The dent the war with China made in Nehru's image helped the opposition, including socialists, to unexpectedly win a round of by-elections in 1963. The era of Congress supremacy was over.

An idea was floated in the party that summer: all senior leaders barring Nehru should devote themselves to building the party at the grassroots while younger leaders would run the Union and state governments. Bakshi was as usual present—a permanent special invitee, since Nehru treated the National Conference as a sister party, refusing to open a Congress unit in the state—when the Congress Working Committee considered the idea. Noticing that Nehru kept glancing at him, Bakshi piped up that he would be the first to resign. When a member chortled that he was not even a Congressman, Bakshi promptly fished out a twenty-five-paise coin for the subscription.

Bakshi told G.M. Rajpuri, who was to become the assembly speaker soon after, that Nehru had told him early in 1963 that some Congress leaders were pressing him to induct his daughter, Indira Gandhi, into the cabinet. Do you think I should induct Indu, he had asked. Bakshi preferred the conservative Morarji Desai as Nehru's putative successor. Even in 1947, Bakshi had been closer to Nehru's conservative deputy, Sardar Patel, than to Nehru. So he told Nehru that inducting Indira would lead to accusations of nepotism. That reply, Baskhi told Rajpuri, was a tactical blunder. Not only was Indira inducted, Bakshi was included among the ousted veterans.

Nehru had made up his mind that Sadiq should take over, but Bakshi delayed. Nehru's aides went to Srinagar to negotiate a compromise and returned to report smugly that Sadiq would be the state's next prime minister and Bakshi would name the majority of the cabinet. But Bakshi suddenly convened a legislative party meeting in early October 1963 at which a lightweight Bakshi loyalist called Shamsuddin became prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir. Sadiq's group stayed away and yet eighty-six of the 101 members of both houses voted for Shamsuddin. Sadiq and his lieutenants stayed out of the new cabinet.

A decade after he had refused to take office unless Abdullah was first locked up, Bakshi had redoubtable clout even in opposition to Nehru. It was not just the legislature that backed him—Kashmir by and large held him in high regard, even though it was also drawn to the Plebiscite Front's nebulous promise of a brave new world.

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Heavy Weapons

The 27th of December 1963 was bitterly cold. In fact, that month had brought one of the worst winters in living memory. Young Mohammed Farooq was in his *hamam*. It was a favourite retreat even on better days: the large stone-floored room at the end of the tiled ground floor corridor was kept warm by a fire below it. It was the private space where he could let his hair down, chatting with friends. They too preferred the informality of the hamam to the sombre halls of the four-storey stucco mansion, its two-foot walls, huge beams and latticed windowpanes far more suitable for Farooq's grand-uncle Yousuf Shah than for the callow twenty-two-year-old whom Bakshi had installed as mirwaiz (to stymie Mirwaiz Yousuf Shah, who had sent Bakshi a message asking to be allowed to return home after a stint as Azad Kashmir president).

That cold morning, three of Farooq's friends came into the hamam, each reporting excitedly that the relic at Hazratbal was missing. A few hours before, the chief trustee of the relic had broken the still night air, yelling that the locks had been broken. Farooq guffawed uproariously each time one of his friends said that, convinced that they were trying to fool him—getting a rise, he thought, out of his new title. Relics—like the one in the shrine beside the Round Room—were at the heart of Kashmir's religiosity and Hazratbal's was the holiest relic of all, a hair gifted by the Prophet from his beard after his Mehraj ascension to meet God.

When he emerged from the cocoon of the hamam, however, it became immediately obvious to Farooq that this was no joke. He could hear Kashmir as it emerged from the lanes opposite his house. The mansion stood beside the stream that the Great King had wound through the city, so that Srinagar in the fifteenth century rivalled

Venice. That morning, people from the inner city were trudging through harsh sleet and icy wind, across the bridge over that stream onto the tiny plaza on which his house stood. He went out and managed to say a few confused words before he was swept on, now at the head of the procession that poured through the labyrinth of city streets, first towards Lal Chowk, then back to Hazratbal, its brick walls grey that afternoon under heavy banks of cloud.

Farooq was too callow to spot the political currents blowing through the knife-like wind that morning, but there were several. Among those who marched in one of the processions to Hazratbal that day were Sadiq and several of his faction's leaders—shouting slogans against the Auqaf Trust, which controlled Muslim shrines for the government. Bakshi still chaired that trust.

Masoodi was at first elusive. When party workers from the Hazratbal area rushed to his cottage just off the road to Manigam early that morning, he did not stir out of bed. Nor did he stir when Sadiq and his Marxists trooped up later that morning. Asking them to see what might happen by the next day, he said he was too ill to move. When Farooq, Abdullah's eldest son, leapt out of his jeep that afternoon and strode grimly in, Masoodi again said he was ill. You are a doctor, he told Farooq. Check my pulse. But Farooq, his jaw set, silently scooped him like a baby and carried him to the jeep. Farooq had no idea what was afoot but he was sure Masoodi's political perspicacity was required. Packed into the back of his jeep with a couple of others was one of the three who had been in the mirwaiz's hamam that morning. One of the others was an associate of Qara.

An action committee emerged as from the icy mist that evening, linking nine groups of more or less political hue, two-thirds of them religious—like the Jamiat-e-Ahle-hadis. The Plebiscite Front and Qara's party were among the others. Taking charge, the committee enforced a shutdown, allowing only shops selling food and medicines to open for a few hours. Wraith-like, Masoodi became its puppeteer, the boy mirwaiz its totem. A message went out over the whispering network that evening to mosques across the valley: Hindus were not responsible for the theft. Pandits must not be harmed. Then, channelling Kashmir's emotions through posters and street corner meetings, the action committee focussed on having Bakshi arrested—and, by the 2nd of January, on having Abdullah released.

Political aspiration had again slipped onto the back of religious fervour. Some posters demanded that prominent Muslim countries or the United Nations be involved in the investigation, and over the next few days the entire subcontinent, and then other Muslims around the world, became riveted to the mystery of the missing relic. Radio Pakistan spewed venom against India and riots tore East Pakistan—forcing Hindus to rush for refuge to India. And then riots ripped India too.

Landslides had closed the Jammu–Srinagar road for days and low clouds, rain and snow kept planes grounded. But an air force pilot defied the weather gods and his manual to fly B.N. Malick, the Intelligence Bureau chief, to Srinagar on New Year's Eve. Malick and the local police brass soon figured out that the theft was an inside job and, with a mix of threats, cajoling and sweet talk, the investigators got those who could have removed the relic to cooperate in its return.

It was recovered on 4 January and its trustees all identified it. Blood returned to Kashmir's cheeks. But the action committee would not let go. That night, slogans rent the air around the Jamia: 'Who will authenticate it? Yousuf Shah and Abdullah.' In tandem with Radio Pakistan's shrill campaign that the replaced relic was not authentic, the action committee insisted that the people would not be satisfied unless the holiest mystics and senior clerics of the valley had identified it. The tempo of their campaign about a fraud by Hindu officials became more vigorous by the day. Nehru, who knew the potency of Kashmir's hyperbolic ways, began to talk terms with Masoodi and Sadiq. The nightmare he had just led his country through had so upset him that he had suffered a stroke two days after the relic's recovery. On the heels of his awful Chinese nightmare, the entire subcontinent had been on the edge of another bloodbath.

Ghulam Mohammed Bhat, whom the mirwaiz had sent with Abdullah's son to fetch Masoodi, was despatched again on the last day in January, this time with Masoodi, to the house of a common associate. Masoodi went in while Bhat waited in a front room, looking out at the garden sloping to the river. When the door opened after a bit, he could hear Masoodi talking on the telephone to 'Panditji'. That was Nehru's preferred title. After ten minutes, Bhat screwed up the courage to go in—and found Sadiq sitting quietly in a corner.

A political deal that could have been historic was in the works. In late January, Nehru had dispatched to Srinagar Lal Bahadur Shastri, a diminutive, amiable colleague of impeccable integrity. He had been brought back to the cabinet without portfolio after Nehru's stroke, having earlier been retired along with Bakshi and other senior leaders.

Masoodi, orchestrating the propaganda about a fraud and the demand for a fresh verification, held the winning cards. He said Kashmir would accept the relic if it was recognized by Fakir Mirak Shah Kashani, the pir of Shalimar. Ever since he had led the first public procession of 1931, Kashani's home had remained a meeting place for National Conference leaders. After negotiations with Shastri, a special viewing was organized at Hazratbal for the 3rd of February.

That day, the mystic sent a message that the Prophet had told him in a dream the relic was authentic. Thirteen other holy men that Masoodi had brought identified the relic in an atmosphere so tense that Shastri was sobbing by the time they were done. The mirwaiz was not among those who identified the relic. Just before they had left for the viewing, Masoodi had whispered to him to come a little later. He did not trust the boy whom Bakshi had installed just a couple of years before.

The identification completed, the deal unfolded. Sadiq was installed in place of Shamsuddin by the end of February. In April, he publicly called for Abdullah's release. And Abdullah was released a few days later, although a battery of celebrated lawyers including M.C. Setalvad, G.S. Pathak and A.K. Sen had assured Nehru just days before that the case against Abdullah was watertight. Regional peace was more important to Nehru than criminal law. Not only had the war with China unleashed geopolitical pressures, the stroke must have told him his days were numbered. Perhaps he wanted to make a last, extraordinarily bold attempt to heal the festering wound, for not only did he invite Abdullah to stay with him in Delhi, he okayed his desire to visit Pakistan and set the stage for a final agreement.

Nehru told his party that peace between India and Pakistan was vital and that the crucial point was that Abdullah did not believe in the two-nation theory. Abdullah went to Pakistan, along with Beg and Masoodi, in the second half of May 1964. He now sought quasi-independence for Kashmir and Muzaffarabad, the territory of the ancient kingdom of Kashmir. Instead of leaving defence and foreign

relations to the Government of India, as the 1952 agreement had envisaged, Abdullah now suggested that these could be jointly managed by India and Pakistan under United Nations' auspices. This was the third option he had listed at Hazratbal in 1958. Greater Kashmir, he called it, perhaps to paper over the shrinking of his putative estate: the remaining parts of Hari Singh's kingdom were to be absorbed into whichever country held them. Abdullah's advisers must have calculated that it would lead to full independence, since India and Pakistan could be counted on not to be able to work together.

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Ghulam Rasool Kochak's family had been minor landlords and it took some time for one of his retainers to run through his rambling Anantnag house to locate him when Abdullah telephoned from Rawalpindi. Abdullah was upbeat when Kochak took the phone. Kochak was the president of the Plebiscite Front that year and Abdullah told him he had called to congratulate him. His mission had succeeded.

K.H. Khurshid of Poonch, who was the president of Azad Kashmir, had backed the plan during discussions although Chaudhary Abbas, who still headed the Muslim Conference, remained committed to Pakistan. Pakistan's president, Ayub Khan, had not said no, and was willing to talk with Nehru. A meeting had been tentatively fixed for next month. As Kochak listened, amazed, Abdullah told him that he wanted Kochak to gather at least 500,000 people at Srinagar so that he could address them as soon as he returned. When Kochak asked if Nehru would agree, Abdullah told him Nehru knew of the proposal they had discussed. That was no doubt true but Makhan Lal Fotedar, who was among Nehru's junior political aides, would maintain decades later that 'If anyone says there was a deal, they are lying. We knew Pakistan would never agree to Sheikh's idea.'

The morning after his conversation with Kochak, Abdullah went to Muzaffarabad. He was addressing a public meeting there when someone climbed the dais and whispered in Masoodi's ear. Masoodi quickly scribbled something and sent it to Abdullah. Tears sprang to Abdullah's eyes as he looked up from the paper to announce that Nehru had died. He read the condolence resolution Masoodi had scribbled,

the last of it through a convulsion of sobs. Abdullah would later write of Nehru as Machiavellian and describe him as an imperialist but that did not preclude his weeping copiously at several condolence meetings, even in the valley. That both sentiments were genuine is very likely.

The delegation returned to Delhi for the funeral and Abdullah accompanied Nehru's ashes to Allahabad. Back in New Delhi, the group had tea with Shastri, now India's prime minister, and then with Indira Gandhi, who remained a minister. Conversation at both meetings was perfunctory but, later that evening, Masoodi got a message: the prime minister wanted to meet him. Sofi drove him to Shastri's house, where they found the new prime minister waiting at the gate. When Masoodi asked why he was standing outside, he replied that it behoved a shastri (an honorific for a religious teacher) to thus receive a maulana. Indira Gandhi joined them midway through the conversation, during which Shastri said he had been briefed about their initiative in Pakistan and wanted them not to go any further. He did not have Nehru's stature and could not get India's Parliament to accept the bold idea they had explored. Asking Masoodi to give him a year to get a grip, he suggested that they use that time to talk to a range of India's leaders in order to build consensus.

Patient diplomacy was Masoodi's forte but he was not the boss. Within weeks, Abdullah destroyed the unity Masoodi had forged even in Kashmir. Convening a meeting of the action committee at the Plebiscite Front headquarters, Abdullah strode in late in a foul temper. Pointing at the young mirwaiz, he bellowed that 'this maulana' met Bakshi before coming to their meetings. The mirwaiz stuttered a denial but, cutting him short, Abdullah yelled for the editor of Kashmir's largest daily, who was waiting just outside the door. When he entered, Abdullah inquired imperiously where he had seen the priest. I was sitting with Bakshi, the editor mumbled, when the mirwaiz came in. Distraught, the young man stalked away and split the group to form the Awami Action Committee (People's Action Committee).

For a while, Abdullah tried to run what remained of the action committee with Abbas Ansari—a young Shia cleric who had studied at Basra and Najaf in Iraq—at the helm. Politically astute beyond his years, Abbas was to have been resident commissioner in Tehran if the Greater Kashmir scheme had clicked. He was well suited to the

role of diplomat but he soon discovered the difficulties of working with Abdullah. The action committee ran aground.

Abdullah and Bakshi continued their separate struggles for power. Abdullah campaigned across the valley for the Plebiscite Front's slogan, 'the right to self-determination', while Bakshi, backed by the signatures of the majority in the assembly, asked to be returned to power. But, Nehru's passion for democracy gone, paranoia ruled Kashmir affairs. Bakshi was jailed for his temerity—in the same Tara Niwas palace where Abdullah had once been held.

Only sixteen of the legislators who had backed Bakshi for premiership wrote to the sadr-e-riyasat to protest. They made no impression amid the haze of fear that had enveloped Kashmir policy in New Delhi since Nehru's death. Responding as several uneasy sections in India called for 'integration' of the state, Sadiq gave up the most vital guarantees of autonomy that Abdullah had wrested. He gave the Union power to take over the state government and, in March 1965, changed his title. The state's prime minister would henceforth be called chief minister; its head of state, governor. Abdullah, who was away for Haj at the time, must have felt affronted. He met China's Chou En-lai along the way—the meeting no doubt arranged by Pakistan.

Uproar ensued in India's Parliament, since the country was still stinging from the Chinese slap, but the uproar served Abdullah's purpose. He was not actually playing Pakistan's game. He was playing to the gallery again, showing Kashmir he could take on India, cocking a snook at 'integration'. But when Abdullah was told his Indian passport would be revoked if he did not return immediately, he returned to confinement within the municipal limits of a hill resort in south India—ignoring an invitation to head a government-in-exile based in Pakistan, an option that Abbas Ansari heard was suggested while Abdullah was in Egypt.

The ideas Abdullah had discussed in May 1964 did not change Pakistan's conviction that Jammu and Kashmir ought to have been part of Pakistan since 1947. Its primary national objective remained

focussed: to set right what it perceived as a historical wrong. The best chance, its military regime figured, was while India was weak after Nehru.

Within days after Nehru's death, guns began to boom across the ceasefire line and the state intelligence unit reported thirty incursions in June 1964 alone, which set the stage for war the next summer. After some diversionary skirmishes at the other end of the India–Pakistan border early that summer, Pakistan launched a second war over Jammu and Kashmir by August 1965. The road from Jammu to Pathankot was nearly severed on 5 September and that sparked a see-saw war as each country relieved pressure at one point on the border by pushing in at another.

The prize among the areas of the state that India controlled was of course the valley, and Pakistan's strategy in the autumn of 1965 was to covertly take over Kashmir while the Indian Army was preoccupied further south. So, in tandem with the main war, Pakistanis filtered across the ceasefire line—more stealthily than in October 1947. Pakistan's air marshal Asghar Khan would write in *The First Round* in 1979: 'It was assumed that widespread support existed within occupied Kashmir to make such a guerilla campaign a success.' No wonder Pakistan's leaders had that misconception. The Plebiscite Front's wily managers had over the years projected far greater active support than they actually had, getting police officers to report the detention of petty thieves as the unravelling of a Pakistan-funded secessionist conspiracy. Those officers got medals and promotions while funds rolled into Kashmir each time—to the Plebiscite Front from a delighted Pakistan and to the Bakshi regime from an anxious India.

The chimera behind Kashmir's crafty hyperbole stunned Pakistan in the autumn of 1965.

Ali Sheikh walked fast, hurrying along the dirt track that led through woods to the next village, Haripora. Nobody else seemed to be out in the eerie stillness of the hot afternoon. Ali Sheikh too had stayed indoors all day but curiosity had finally got the better of him and he had decided to walk to Ali Ganai's house. As village chowkidar, designated to ensure

order, Ganai might know more about the rumour Ali Sheikh had picked up—that some of the Pakistanis who had first been spotted near Tangmarg in early July were now near Manigam.

He had almost reached Ali Ganai's house when he stopped short and shrank into the shade of a large tree. Chuni Lal Bhat, who ran the rural development office at Haripora, was coming the other way. The Pandit stopped at the grocery shop at the bottom of Ali Ganai's garden and began to select vegetables. Ali Sheikh strained to listen as the shopkeeper gave Chuni Lal exactly the gossip Ali Sheikh had come to hear. It helped that the shopkeeper was deaf and tended to shout nasally. Have you heard, he asked Chuni Lal, the men from Pakistan have taken Mohammed Yusuf of the sheep farm captive and pitched camp at the farm. The sheep farm was in the hills above Manigam and of course there was no dearth of meat there. The Pandit had come for the same reason as Ali Sheikh but pretended to concentrate on picking vegetables while he casually asked where the shopkeeper had heard this. From the chowkidar, he replied. Ali Sheikh watched as the Pandit dropped the vegetables and went round to the chowkidar's house. Ali Sheikh turned back. He had learnt enough to figure that it would be best to keep his head down until he was sure who was winning.

After confirming the story with the chowkidar, Chuni Lal went to the house of a Pandit intelligence operative and asked him to inform the soldiers at Woyil Bridge—which had been thrown over the Sindh Nalla not far from Manigam when Indian Army vehicles needed to get across Zoji La to Ladakh in 1948. It was a vital link and a picket had been posted to guard it a couple of weeks earlier, after a shepherd from Tangmarg had informed the army that Pakistanis had filtered across the ceasefire line. Still worried after dinner, Chuni Lal walked back to the intelligence man's house and, when he found that the fellow was too scared to go, went himself. Tucking a lantern under his phiran so that its light would not be visible from far, he walked through the shadows to the bridge. When the man in charge of the picket had been roused from the trench he was sleeping in, they found that the telephone line had been cut. Luckily for them, the soldiers had a wireless set too and were able to call for reinforcements.

Chuni Lal was still awake when deafening explosions rent the night. Beginning at 2.45 a.m., they continued for more than an hour.

At dawn, he slipped around to the tallest house in Manigam, another Pandit's, and peeped from the top. What looked to him like a battalion of men was returning from the bridge. They were Pakistanis and, from their ordered retreat, seemed to be trained soldiers. Indian reinforcements had arrived in time to hold the bridge.

An hour later, the watchman from Haripora's community centre scurried up, looking distraught. The Pakistanis had come at night, he reported, locked him in a bathroom and broken into the store and the strong box. They had taken cash, wheat, oil and salt from the stocks of the food and civil supplies department, which sold subsidized food rations. Its storeroom was in the cottage at Haripora that housed Chuni Lal's rural development office. The Pandit wondered whether the watchman had actually been locked up or had let the Pakistanis help themselves. In Manigam, as in much of Kashmir, only the uncommon few—not always Pandits—risked their lives to combat the infiltrators. On the other hand, determined support for them was as rare. Kashmir for the most part either sat tight or made money, reporting its presumed liberators for a few rupees.

One of the few places that received the infiltrators with fulsome warmth was Batmaloo, the workers' suburb of Srinagar. The most potent agglomeration of poor who had gained nothing from land reforms, it had become passionately committed to Pakistan since Qara, who lived there, had launched a pro-Pakistan political party just a couple of months before Abdullah's arrest in 1953. Qara was frustrated by then, for Abdullah had left him out in the cold. Centred in Batmaloo, workers of the nebulous Muslim Youth Federation—which was initially mentored by Faqir Mirak Shah, who had so momentously identified the relic in 1964—worked hard to help the infiltrators in 1965 but could do little more than paste posters and relay messages.

The infiltrators must have felt frustrated. Beg had had himself put in jail and when the leading infiltrators went to the Plebiscite Front headquarters to contact Haji Mohammed Isak, whom they had been told would liaise, they found Masoodi sitting there and told him all—since the description they had of Isak fit Masoodi too. Abbas Ansari was told their plan was to grab the weapons of those on security duty at the annual procession to mark Abdullah's arrest on the 9th of August, and then lead the crowd to overthrow the government. On

Masoodi's advice, Abdullah's family cancelled the procession. Masoodi had adroitly turned the relic crisis into a search for independence but he frowned on the Plebiscite Front's monetary dependence on Pakistan. Still, he went along when Qara went to persuade his cousin, Sadiq, to invite the visitors to lunch (four of the leading visitors were staying with Qara). Over lunch, they described their plan to take over the radio station and announce Kashmir's accession to Pakistan. Sadiq heard them silently. After the meal, he wished them Godspeed for their journey home.

Much of Batmaloo was destroyed in a huge fire on the 10th of October. Batmaloo's responsiveness having been isolated, Pakistan gained nothing. The war ended at year-end, when the Soviet Union, backed by the US and UK, brokered a return to the status quo ante. India vacated the Haji Pir pass, which connected Uri to Poonch.

The stress killed Shastri immediately after that agreement was signed and Nehru's daughter, Indira, became prime minister.

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Effervescence

The second war between India and Pakistan yielded no territory either way but dovetailed with the relic crisis to puncture the sense of placid well-being that Bakshi had created. In particular, those shocks heightened the frustrations of a new presence that had slipped in unnoticed: a middle class. Except for a small number of Pandits, Kashmir had not known such a class for centuries. But the education and development that Bakshi had provided had created a substantial number who would every weekday rub talc under a washed armpit, button a crisp shirt, comb a shock of hair till it was plastered and take a bus to work.

There were not enough suitable jobs, however. The social prestige that Kashmir had always yearned for made the sons of the vast numbers who had gained land unwilling to work it. Since there was barely any industry, these sons wanted clerical jobs, like Pandits. Although Bakshi had expanded bureaucracy to accommodate a great many, demand had outstripped the supply of government jobs by the late 1960s.

Frustrations grew. The myth that education breeds liberality is not true. The perception of social security does. In fact, insecure middle classes tend to grab at straitjacketed religiosity—and this one had been weaned on the oblique references to religion with which the Plebiscite Front had laced its ambivalent promises. Some had even taken to whispering *raishumari*, plebiscite, into the other ear after uttering the primary kalima of Islam into a newborn's ear.

As Pandits were generally better employed, Muslims' economic frustrations strengthened this consciousness of a Kashmiri Muslim identity, particularly around the city. It fed anti-India sentiment—Hindus being seen as Indian. Vicious anti-Hindu posters appeared in

the winter of 1965–66. And soon, communal antagonism reached such a pass that National Conference workers (presumed to be pro-Indian) were at times refused burial space. All this, of course, heightened Pandits' insecurity. In fact, Muslims' economic frustrations were not caused by Muslims not being employed, only by their aspirations ballooning faster than the numbers employed. And the mushrooming number of Muslims employed in government bred insecurity among Pandits.

The result of this cycle of fear was that when a Pandit girl eloped with her Muslim boyfriend in 1967 it sparked a frenzied reaction. Although the young woman melodramatically handed her kerchief to her Muslim beau—as to a medieval European knight—as they entered court together for her to state that she was under no duress, riots erupted across the valley. It was to become a historical marker of communal antagonism. As the valley became a tinder-box, a problem that was to get worse in post-Nehru India emerged. By pushing the Hindu version of the monocultural template upon which Pakistan was founded, national politicians would upset Kashmir further. Around 1967, inflammatory statements by Balraj Madhok, a Hindu bigot, accentuated Kashmir's socio-economic tensions. Madhok now presided over the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which Shyama Prasad Mookerjee had founded. Newspapers reported Madhok sneering that Muslims could not even agree on how to raise their elbows while praying and saying that the whole lot should be hurled across the border into Pakistan.

A vicious cycle churned. Madhok's statements melded with Pandit hysteria and the Plebiscite Front's propaganda to inspire various new anti-India initiatives, both political and militant, among Kashmir's Muslims. In fact, most Kashmiri Muslims whose political attitudes matured between 1965 and 1990 became strongly anti-India. An All Jammu and Kashmir Students' and Youth League came up to express that animosity. It had been forming nebulously since the relic crisis through the animated discussions of a score of activists, mostly from the engineering and medical colleges. Its leading lights were often the sons of prosperous 'goats' or of the once-privileged sort who would have been at the Round Room. The general secretary, for instance, was Anwar Asahi, whose father had mentored the Reading Room Party at his downtown home in Asahi Kucha (Asahi Lane).

They had much to target India with: its paranoid treatment of not only Abdullah but also Bakshi. Plus, it was easy to pin on New Delhi blame for the misdoings of the state government—the unending repression of civic rights (Anwar Asahi himself was picked up while parking his motorcycle in Lal Chowk and not heard of for seven months), the National Conference cadre's oligarchic power and the succession of rigged elections. Among those who listened wide-eyed almost every afternoon in the park outside his school in Anantnag was a class 9 student called Shabir Shah. He hailed from a propertied family of pirs, some of whom claimed Syed descent. Inflamed by Madhok's speeches, Shabir went along with a group of boys who decided in the summer of 1968 to act. Taking a bus to Srinagar, they walked around the corner from the terminal to the Jana Sangh office in Lal Chowk and, shinnying up the wall, tore down the party flag. They burnt it in a little bonfire, dancing around it as they yelled '*Murdabad*', slogans wishing death to the Jana Sangh and to Balraj Madhok. Fourteen-year-old Shabir Shah and several others were dragged to jail.

Some of the better-educated leaders of the Students' and Youth League disdained the Plebiscite Front as a cynical bunch of opportunists—so much so that the Front floated a rival youth league—but it also contained members who looked up to at least the Islamist dressing of the Plebiscite Front. The pious young Fazl-ul Haq Qureshi, for instance, had begun with the Muslim Youth Federation. Some of them began to think of themselves as a wing of the Plebiscite Front. Most of them were in jail by 1966 but, when they were let out, one of them knifed a soldier standing guard on a Srinagar bridge and snatched his gun. They all went underground then and a couple of them crossed the ceasefire line early in 1968. Cynical of Kashmiri promises after 1965, Pakistan kept its purse strings tight but its army's general headquarters agreed to train the boys with guns and bombs.

And so was born Al Fatah, Kashmir's first guerrilla force. Its biggest success was a heist at a bank in Langat in the north, from which the boys made off with 80,000 rupees. Bucked up, they thought they should try something bigger. So they arrived, dressed in police uniforms, at the university branch of the Jammu and Kashmir Bank towards the end of 1970. There, they announced that a fraud had occurred at the bank's headquarters and cash from all its branches was being recalled

for accounting. The managers readily went along and things went smoothly until one employee recognized one of the Al Fatah boys, a medical student, and casually asked when he had given up medicine to join the police. The boy mumbled that he had only done so recently and his friends quickly finished loading the cash. With the identity of one of the robbers, the real police were able to round up the entire lot and not much came of Al Fatah thereafter.

Around that time, the son of a well-to-do inner city trader firmly dedicated to the mirwaiz tried to use his chemistry lessons to make bombs in his bedroom. They fizzled impotently every time but he would not give up. A small, dark, intense boy, he had marched off with head held high when, at the age of eighteen, he had first been arrested in 1965. Calling himself Azam Inquilabi, when he was released, he earnestly lectured young neighbours. The better-looking, more sociable fellows barely tolerated him but a small band of teenagers humoured him by sticking up anti-India posters before they too returned to teenage pursuits.

Alone again in 1968, Azam began a trek across the mountains. Not very robust, he was ready to collapse when he got across the ceasefire line but was slammed into jail and tortured for eight months as an Indian agent. He was released after the Azad Kashmir high court decreed that it was no crime for a Kashmiri to cross the line but his reprieve was temporary. Ready to collapse again on his way back in 1970, vomiting the sour grass and ice he had eaten for two days, Azam was arrested by India's Border Security Force. His uncle, a senior police officer, got him released.

Much of the insurrectionist effervescence of the 1960s sputtered as pathetically as that but one man stood out: Maqbool Butt. Perhaps it was his humble birth that gave Maqbool such passionate dynamism—he was born to a tailor in a corner of Kupwara that the tribesmen had ruled for many months in 1948. He had fought the traumas that miserably embarrassed him when he was a shy boy, leaving him quaking each time a teacher shot a question at him. But he had grown into a strapping, radiant young fellow. His bluff warmth and dazzling smile could charm in minutes.

He had trekked across the ceasefire line in 1958, when he was twenty-two, and become a journalist in Peshawar. Soon disillusioned with Pakistan, he had returned in 1966, powered by a passion for independence. He found strongest support from families that had lost out to land reforms and social egality—such as the Syed Andrabis, at whose home not far from the Jamia he stayed several weeks. He moved around the valley for months, speaking avidly to anyone who might possibly be interested, from Bakshi to the teenaged Shabir Shah, about the Jammu and Kashmir National Liberation Front which a group of young men had recently formed on the other side of the ceasefire line. It could be a sort of military wing of the Plebiscite Front, he said animatedly, but responses were invariably guarded.

The most common responses in fact involved fear for his safety. Maqbool, however, had the supreme confidence of a 1960s' film hero, played by actors like Shammi Kapoor. He was coasting along the road to Uri one day when his hefty Enfield sputtered and stopped on a deserted stretch of road winding through the hills. Unable to figure out the problem, he looked around but no help was in sight—until a truck lumbered round a bend. It was an Indian Army truck but Maqbool waved the driver to a halt with a commanding gesture and announced that he was a secret agent and had to get to Uri urgently. The soldier fixed the motorcycle while Maqbool stood by, smoking a cigarette.

Maqbool's extraordinary energy bore no fruit, though, for his visit was cut short. Soon after he and his associates had killed a police inspector who had slipped into their ranks, Butt was caught and sentenced to death. Kashmir had ways to get him miraculously from Srinagar jail to Muzaffarabad but, like Azam a couple of years later, he was promptly tortured there in case he was an Indian double agent. Pakistan never had the measure of Kashmir. When double agents were actually at work, it greeted them with garlands.

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Maqbool Butt was the only activist of the time who spoke of secular, egalitarian freedom but Kashmir by and large had only heard of his daring escapades, not his ideas. The range of other anti-India activists from Shabir Shah to Azam Inquilabi used the language of Islamic identity—although, steeped as they were in Kashmiri ambivalence,

they remained open to both independence and Pakistan. Their activism after all was fuelled, albeit subliminally, by the frustrations of their once-privileged families.

Ironically, one reason they struck a chord among the rural masses was the success of land reforms. Common perception often confused these isolated sparks of activism with the Plebiscite Front—and Abdullah. Uneasy after the spurt of development under Bakshi had petered out, people presumed that this rhetoric of Islamic insularity would somehow ring in further socio-economic transformation. Abdullah's speeches about land reforms had after all begun with Quranic recitations.

The people most clearly devoted to Pakistan were reformed puritans. And, among such groups, the Jamaat-e-Islami alone had a significant rural presence. By this time it had began to attract many of the new middle class, particularly doctors and engineers. Often sons of tillers or tailors, they turned to religious orthodoxy as an assertion of respectability in unfamiliar new social milieus. There were not very many such rural professionals, however, and the large majority remained committed to traditional religiosity. It was only in pockets where land reforms had been rolled back—by consolidating orchards, which were exempt from land ceilings—that the Jamaat dominated. In Sopore, that centre of trade that had lost the most from partition, and in Shopian, the alternative trade route ever since the Mughals had made it their gateway to Kashmir, landlords had used the exemption for orchards to retain land. As the apple trade flourished, smaller orchards in these pockets were leased to larger ones for economy of scale. That stepped up profit margins—and further reversed land reforms.

By the late 1960s, gradually increasing prosperity across India had created a demand for Kashmiri apples and the orchards of Sopore and Shopian thrived, to the extent that Sopore began to be called 'Little London'. But merchant-dominated Sopore's ancient anti-establishment tendencies sharpened apace. Its merchants resented the closure of the Muzaffarabad road, its landlords despised the party of land reforms, and the boatmen and other poor had gained little from those reforms. So it was in the counter-revolutionary milieu of the apple belts, Sopore and Shopian, that the doctrines which Saduddin had brought back from Dar-ul-Islam found greatest salience. In 1972, Sopore elected Ali Shah Geelani, the puritanical teacher whom Masoodi had mentored, as its legislator.

Prosperity also brought schism: Kashmir's ambivalence gradually surfaced within the Jamaat during the 1970s. Most members—often from the once-privileged landlord classes, even pirs—had turned to it as a comforting shelter from Abdullah's unsettling Marxian programme. Wishing for a return to the old establishment, they did not quite give up Kashmir's shrine-worshipping religiosity, only tempered it so that meditation and private prayers replaced superstitious ritual. To that extent, a gap had developed between them and their founder, Maududi, who now led a far more political movement. Having begun with opposition to the Pakistan plan, Maududi had recast his doctrines. Based in Pakistan, he pushed for the capture of state power in order to establish God's will on earth. The chief purpose of Kashmir's Jamaat leaders, on the other hand, was to preach morality. When Saduddin, Jamaat's founder in Kashmir, had urged the *shoura* (council) in 1969 to approve Jamaat's participation in elections, he had argued that it would give them opportunities to spread their message of rectitude. He had no desire to rule.

Most of his colleagues were not like him, however. They fell in line with the deal-making that went on behind the masquerade of Kashmir's elections. They were allowed to win five seats in the elections of 1972 as part of a deal that one of the other five opposition victors, Abdul Rashid Kabuli of the Students' and Youth League, said Mir Qasim had agreed to under Masoodi's influence. And in 1977, Geelani was the only Jamaat candidate to scrape through from Sopore—after votes from a booth in the constituency, a National Conference stronghold, were not counted. He had secretly appealed to Masoodi, who had signalled the election commission to let Geelani win.

By then, Geelani was in the vanguard of those within the Jamaat who despised what they saw as compromised religiosity and the far too limited political agenda of their colleagues. They wished, like Maududi, for the Jamaat to be God's instrument to take over the state and enforce God's will.

Oblivious to the socio-economic changes that had spawned new aspirations and caused frustrations that radical ideologies could feed upon, Abdullah's leadership, even though he was still imprisoned, relied on the feudal adulation that he had revelled in before he went to jail.

Majestic grace packed tautly into a tiny frame, his wife waved, smiling through pursed lips, as a crowd roared slogans in praise of *madre meherban,* Mother Beneficent. More than 10,000 were gathered before her around the market square outside the tomb of Kashmir's pastoral saint, Sheikh Nooruddin Wali, at Tsrar, 40 kilometres from Srinagar. Wali had waxed lyrical of Laleshwari, Kashmir's dervish grandmother, and of Fatima, whose sons had been mourned more than any other's. Five centuries after he had composed those quatrains, the love of the primeval, nurturing mother still mesmerized Kashmir. Only people in rugged climates that require brutality for survival shut out mother goddesses and Kashmir had never been accused of ruggedness. So Abdullah knew that fielding his wife was a winning move.

It was sound strategy but historically ironic. For, just when his ambivalent rhetoric had conjured nebulous dreams of secession in the mind of Kashmir, and even spawned insurgents—albeit isolated men for the nonce—Abdullah's own mind was churning by the end of the 1960s with the idea of returning to power under India's aegis. To manage that safely, Abdullah knew he could depend on the support of those who had gained from land reforms. But he also knew that he had to squash Bakshi first. Even after the relic crisis had wounded Bakshi's career, his candidates had swept the valley's western flank in the assembly elections of 1967 and might have taken more seats but for rigging. South Kashmir at least had been rigged wholesale that year, for the returning officer at Anantnag managed to reject most of the nomination papers that were not of the ruling party. Sadiq was not monetarily corrupt but his idealism had its limits. Despite such strong-arm state tactics, though, Bakshi had won the Srinagar seat in India's Parliament and his career graph was rising again.

Which is why Mrs Abdullah emerged publicly to campaign for Shamim Ahmed Shamim, a paperweight activist with the temerity to fight Bakshi for that Parliamentary seat in early 1971. She got Masoodi to join her, using a tactic as Indian as turmeric: having called her sister, she said, he could not let her burn now that her husband had hurled her into a fire. Masoodi went with her to a campaign meeting at Hazratbal and declared that if Abdullah told them to they would even vote for a lamppost. That became the campaign's punch line: '*Khambe ko vote do*'. It became a battle not between the candidates in the fray but over whether Abdullah's writ ran.

Bakshi's backers were soon jittery.

The lamppost was standing dutifully beside Adbullah's wife outside the sage's tomb in Tsrar when workers loyal to Bakshi swooped down the slopes to the square, yelling and pushing. The lady's shawl fell to the ground, and Masoodi's blanket. The lamppost was scratched on the head. From the next day on, he stood poignantly by at eight election meetings a day, head swathed in red-painted bandage, while speaker after speaker lambasted the unspeakable assault on Mother Beneficent. It squashed Bakshi's campaign—which had already been punctured by a fight engineered at his first public meeting in the inner city, with the police swooping in and driving the crowd away. Sadiq's administration too did not want Bakshi to win.

Three decades later, the man who had led the attack at Tsrar was a minister in the lady's son's cabinet and one of the Al Fatah boys presided over the legislature, but Kashmir did not blink. If it had been the sort to look askance at leaders who played both sides at once, it would not have responded to Mrs Abdullah's campaign. But it did, defeating Bakshi—and encouraging the Plebiscite Front to talk terms with India.

Two front adherents had already contested by-elections in the late 1960s and by the third week of November 1971, nine months after the lady's campaign, Beg—the brain behind the Plebiscite Front—took a walk on a lawn in Delhi at the wedding reception of the daughter of a senior Congress leader from Kashmir. Walking beside him was another Kashmiri, influential in the Congress, Makhan Lal Fotedar. The conversation had its fair share of Kashmir's histrionics and incertitude. Beg flicked on a transistor radio, so that the noise would interfere with recording devices, before turning guardedly to say that he accepted accession with all its implications. But Fotedar too was Kashmiri, suspicious of every nuance. He asked whether Beg's 'I' should not be 'we'. Less than three months later, Beg made a public statement using the collective pronoun. Sadiq had died during those months and drawing Abdullah back into India's mainstream was a priority of Mir Qasim, who had succeeded Sadiq as chief minister. The map too had changed. Nehru's daughter, invincible Indira for the moment, had led India to a decisive victory over Pakistan. East Pakistan had become Bangladesh, exploding the two-nation theory. And no more money was to be had from the Pakistani mission in

New Delhi, which was to remain defunct for four years. Not only that, Indira had got Zulfikar Bhutto, who took over as Pakistan's prime minister after the war fiasco, to agree that the ceasefire line would henceforth be called the Line of Control. She meant it as a first step towards turning it into the agreed border.

Indira's nominee, G. Parthasarathi, discussed terms with Beg over the next three years. He also interacted with Abdullah, now detained in a small bungalow at Delhi's Kotla Lines. But Indira had proclaimed that the hands of the clock would not be turned back. Her style was a contrast to her father's solicitousness. When, a couple of years earlier, a majority of Congress legislators—Sadiq having merged the National Conference into the Congress—had gone to say they wanted to replace Sadiq as house leader, she had snapped that their leader would change when she decided. They were out of her office one and a half minutes after they had entered and Mir Qasim, for whom they were lobbying, wrote in his autobiography: 'Her language so offended them that they decided to tender their resignations en masse.' (Of course they did not.) So it was she who decided Abdullah could return as chief minister, not prime minister. The special Article 370 he had forced into India's constitution would remain a paper tiger and little more than the state flag would remain of the agreement he had so haughtily obtained in 1952.

When Abbas Ansari visited Kotla Lines, Abdullah told him Beg was making him do it and Beg said Abdullah undid every knot he put into the process. By the beginning of 1975 Abdullah, Beg and Indira reached an agreement for Abdullah to return to power.

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Dev Kant Barooah, the Congress president, had come to Jammu from Delhi for the function at which the Congress Legislature Party, which dominated the state assembly, was to elect Abdullah as chief minister of the state. Mir Qasim, the out-going chief minister that day, went for a nap after having lunch with Barooah but he never got to sleep. Indira Gandhi telephoned almost as soon as he lay down, and then again. In between, he had to consult with Barooah and several others.

By the time the decision was taken, only minutes remained for the function and a herd of pressmen waited outside. The speech had

been cyclostyled and it was too late to make fresh copies. So party workers hunched over reams of scattered paper, painting over the title on each copy before laboriously scrawling a fresh one in. 'Speech of Janab Sheikh Abdullah on Election as Leader of Congress Legislature Party' became 'Speech of Janab Sheikh Abdullah Accepting Support of Congress Legislature Party'.

Beg had spent three years negotiating with Indira's nominee whether the head of government could be called prime minister rather than chief minister but nobody had bothered about measuring the political backing required to return them to power, or even about the constitutional mechanics of a legislative majority. Abdullah had so utterly given up on his independence dream that he was as willing to take power as leader of the Congress as of the National Conference. He had even paid the twenty-five paise subscription and donned a Gandhi cap before a meeting of Congress workers on the Secretariat lawns in Jammu. But at the eleventh hour, Indira's advisers had baulked at handing him the Congress' house majority. He might betray them again, argued Congress leaders in Delhi who had hitherto called the shots in the state. If, on the other hand, the party supported him in coalition, their overwhelming majority would give them the whip hand.

Abdullah fell in line and dutifully read the speech thanking the Congress legislators for their support. By the next day, though, he had reached the end of his tether. Shamim, who had played lamppost four years earlier, slunk up to Qasim in the regal hall of the governor's mansion, where all was set for Abdullah to take the oath of office. Abdullah was not coming, he whispered. Qasim scurried to Abdullah's house, where he found the tall man slumped morosely in pajamas. Indira had replied to a Parliamentary debate in which a rousing orator called Atal Behari Vajpayee, Madhok's successor, had described Abdullah's return as a sell-out by Indira. Deftly, she had made a speech that sounded to Kashmiri ears as if Abdullah had surrendered.

He was not going to go ahead with it, Abdullah said glumly. He did succumb to Qasim's argument that he could do more in power than by sitting on the sidelines, but it was a bad start and it got steadily worse. Abdullah and Beg, along with one each from Jammu and Ladakh, remained the only ministers while Congress factions squabbled over who should join them. When six were named, five were from one faction. So a fresh list of four was drawn up, to join four

Abdullah nominees, but the Congress' four stayed away to protest the fact that Abdullah's four included one who had defected from the Congress—an ambitious young man from the north called Abdul Ghani Lone.

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Lone was destined to be one of the standard bearers of the aspiration for Kashmiri independence that Abdullah had once stood for. For the moment, however, both aspired for power within the establishment. In fact, the only assertive proponent of independence in the mid-1970s was Maqbool Butt, and he had been away ever since he had been smuggled across the ceasefire line in 1968 under sentence of death. About a year after Abdullah returned to power, however, Butt returned and, in one of those chance encounters that become keys of history, handed on the idea to a new generation.

At the age of twelve, Abdul Ahad Waza was an unlikely historical figure, for he belonged to a poor family in a village at the edge of Kashmir. But he happened to be playing with a friend in the forest of pines near that village when he suddenly noticed someone watching. There were three men behind some bushes and their appearance was unsettling—dishevelled, dirty, as if they had travelled a great distance. Waza was scared but, as he stared uncertainly, one of the three smiled reassuringly and began to speak suavely. He was tall and very fair, like a European, and his light eyes twinkled as he smiled at the boys. Ambling over, he sat down on a rock and, patting a spot beside him, asked the boys to sit. He said he and his colleagues were engineers, there for a survey. Continuing to talk, he turned gradually to politics and spoke animatedly of freedom and liberty while little Waza listened, fascinated. A few days later, the newspapers were full of a dramatic arrest. Maqbool Butt, who had magically got to Muzaffarabad after being sentenced to hang eight years earlier, had been caught. Waza was more interested in politics than most boys his age. So after he had heard the radio reports for a couple of days, something clicked in his head: that fascinating fair man must have been Maqbool Butt. Butt's village was walking distance from his.

It had indeed been Maqbool. He had met Shabir Shah, Fazl-ul Haq Qureshi and some of their comrades from the People's League.

That was the group former Students' and Youth League and Al Fatah boys had launched from prison after Abdullah had returned the previous year. (Beg had bought some of their colleagues with lucrative construction and forestry contracts.) When Butt had sent a message, Shah, Qureshi and their comrades had hurried to his village but, with gallows dancing in their frightened minds, had beseeched him to go back. Maqbool had been dismissive, saying they must prepare to wage war against India. Pakistan would support them politically and diplomatically and he would somehow arrange arms and training. At those meetings, they never tried to sort out their divergent visions of Kashmir's future—the People's League being committed to merger with Pakistan (even if it never said so on paper) and Butt to independence from both India and Pakistan.

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Kashmir's ambivalence was not limited to its leaders. A possibly apocryphal story goes thus. When Nehru asked Bakshi how many Kashmiris were with him, Bakshi replied: four million. Since that was the population of the place, Nehru asked in surprise how many were then with Abdullah. Four million, replied Bakshi again.

Not a leaf stirred when Bhutto called for a strike to protest Abdullah's deal. Yet, Kashmir cheered tumultuously when Abdullah's convoy drove into the valley from Jammu four days later, Abdullah having taken office at the winter capital. At least older Kashmiris still worshipped the man who had liberated them from virtual slavery but Kashmir had also been enamoured of the Plebiscite Front's many-splendoured bubbles. Quite apart from frustration over stalled development post-Bakshi, Kashmir's insularity was in play. It did not accept being ruled from a capital beyond its mountain walls. Only Sopore clearly showed Abdullah anger. When Abdullah visited Sopore, a mob jostled rudely around his car. Abdullah's temper had not changed, nor his concept of the relationship between him and those he ruled. He emerged in a fury, swinging his large hands at those standing nearest.

Kashmir, however, had grown greatly in confidence a generation after land reforms and free, universal education. A people that had cowered for centuries before its rulers, and gazed worshipfully at

Abdullah during the 1940s and gratefully at Bakshi during the 1950s, had learnt that they could show their rulers anger. Abdullah, on the other hand, had become a small man—'a caged lion', his biographer Yusuf Teng would remark years later. He only revived the National Conference after Indira came to Srinagar to announce that the Congress was there to stay as a separate party.

So insecure was Abdullah that he sent Teng, who was director of information, to record her speech. When Teng played the tape back to him, Abdullah gawked at the bit in which she said corruption was a universal phenomenon. But he did not counter the idea. Indeed, over the next couple of years, some Kashmiris got the impression that Abdullah and his colleagues were making up for lost time to feather their nests. His backers watched dumbfounded as the officer who first testified against him got promotions after five minutes alone with him and notoriously corrupt chief engineers, who people thought he would hang, became his favourites.

In a man whom Kashmir had once been ready to worship, the loss of moral authority was as distressing as the betrayal that Kashmir saw in his deal with Indira. Resentment had ballooned by the time, in March 1977, Indira lost key general elections for Parliament and suddenly used the whip hand she had retained. As soon as the Congress withdrew its support, however, Abdullah called a snap poll.

It was a desperate move and the ensuing elections were equally desperate: a bizarre round of insincerity. Abullah's disparate opponents—the mirwaiz, Qara, even Lone (who had formed a new party after the Congress had prevented Abdullah from appointing him a minister)—rushed to Delhi to get the new amalgam that had defeated Indira to adopt them. But leaders of the amalgam, the Janata Party, preferred to ally with Abdullah. It was only when Abdullah insisted that his party would contest all Muslim-dominated constituencies, leaving only Hindu-dominated ones for Janata candidates, did they turn to his opponents. They told these opponents to accept Masoodi as their leader. But Masoodi, it turned out, wanted Adbullah to win. Abdullah had turned secretly to Masoodi for help after facing public ire early in the campaign—or so Sofi, who remembered carrying messages, maintained decades later.

India's new prime minister, Morarji Desai—the man whom Bakshi had wanted to succeed Nehru—was soon thoroughly confused. On the eve of the elections, a meeting of officials waited for Desai to confirm what both deputy prime ministers had already indicated: that the Janata Party should win. But Desai strode in to tell them crisply that they should simply conduct elections. He did not know which side was better, he added. They were so unpredictable. Desai had been treated to Kashmir's feints at their most graphic. At the mirwaiz's public meeting, cheering crowds had leaned from inner city windows as women swayed to the drum beats of earthen *tumbaknaris* and sang '*Pakistan nu ghazi aayo*'. They believed indeed that Pakistan's slayer of infidels had come. As Desai surveyed the place bathed in green, the mirwaiz had leaned over to proudly whisper that the chair he was sitting on had not been used for decades, since Jinnah had sat upon it.

On the other side, Beg was going around waving lumps of rock salt and pointing to the green lining of his waistcoat, his eyes round with meaning. Kashmir, which had not seen rock salt since the road from Pakistan had closed in 1947, got the impression that Beg was promising that these elections would lead to secession from India. Finally, the elections were not clinched by allusions to the Line of Control, an Islamic future, or Pakistan, but by emotion, hyperbolic Kashmiri emotion. Abdullah was on his deathbed, it was declared. And Kashmir gave him a huge majority.

The Congress was squeezed to insignificance. Yet, in the years following the drama that returned him to power in 1977, Abdullah must have realized that resentment was compressing slowly into lava. Muscle and mellifluence had been his substitutes for governance, and twenty-two years in jail had made him no more equal to the complex challenge of meeting burgeoning aspirations. Desai handed him almost double what he sought as the state's annual grant but he knew not how to invest it.

What he retained was the pulse of his people and his ability to respond with a grandly combative gesture. When Zia-ul Haq, the general who had seized power from Zulfikar Bhutto in 1977, hanged Bhutto—who had endeared himself to Kashmir with rhetoric even grander than Abdullah's—with the backing of the Pakistan chapter of Jamaat-e-Islami, Abdullah turned the heat on Kashmir's Jamaat. He was sure, he declared, that people would control their anger, not burn the houses of Jamaat men or chop their orchards. His party goons

did just that. The aggressive tactic diverted Kashmir's anger for a while but if he thought it would also squash the Jamaat's political potential, he miscalculated. When tempers cooled, the moral middle class heard the Jamaat more sympathetically through the turbulent 1980s.

Kashmiri society had matured to the extent that people yearned for an economy that went beyond egalitarian agriculture, one that would allow people to express their strong sense of self-worth in something more than manual labour. The Jamaat offered a pattern for human dignity based on hidebound virtue. That the Jamaat nevertheless remained isolated to a few families, often of first-generation professionals, was a testament to the tenacity of Kashmir's lyrical, superstitious religiosity—and the success of Abdullah's early land reforms in keeping Kashmir for the most part occupied by its buoyant agriculture, albeit in a state of frustrated restlessness. However, as it had through history, Kashmir once again began to express its frustrations through communal and sectarian discord. By the end of the 1970s, Shia–Sunni riots erupted occasionally, and subtly expressed animosity against Pandits was on the rise.

A new word entered the propaganda lexicon: Kashmiriyat. It sought to propagate the myth that Kashmir's sects and religious communities had for centuries lived in harmony. How dangerous such obfuscation of situations that need to be confronted and resolved can be would become evident in 1990.

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Ali Sheikh had an encounter with Abdullah which demonstrated that, bereft of ideas for further social transformation, Abdullah towards the end of his life offered little more than feudal suzerainty. Their interaction consisted of Ali Sheikh pressing Abdullah's feet with all the power of his strong hands while Abdullah commanded him to press harder. A legislator who had been a mentor to Ali Sheikh, getting him contacts and contracts, had taken him along to Abdullah's house. Speaking authoritatively to the legislator, Abdullah asked when he planned to get married and then announced that he would find a bride for him. True to his feudal word, the ruler fixed a match—with the daughter of a poor widow of good family.

To blame Abdullah for this feudal relationship between ruler and ruled would only be partly fair. Kashmir's habit of seeking individual advantage rather than systemic improvements for all was as much to blame. Having been into Abdullah's personal chamber, Ali Sheikh figured that the introduction should be spun to advantage. So, when grumbling reached a pitch among party workers around Ganderbal, Ali Sheikh suggested that he would lead them to Abdullah. They were upset because a senior officer had fenced off a huge meadow on which their cattle used to graze, and registered it as his uncle's property—at a throwaway price. They bustled off with Ali Sheikh early one morning to the queues outside Abdullah's house. When they got their turn to beg, Abdullah rang a bell and ordered an aide to summon that officer. He arrived before long and was roundly abused, then slapped hard, while Abdullah bellowed that he would tour the area in a couple of days.

There was jubilation in the villages around Ganderbal that evening. The fences were gone. The way it had been accomplished, however, did not let people take charge of their lives. It allowed them only to seek favours from a sultan without the title. At least in the cities, the new middle class—which, ironically, Abdullah's land reforms had unleashed—was certainly not in a mood to press a feudal master's feet.

Sadiq's death in 1971 had ended the era of ideologues in the party. 'We have given up the battle of ideas,' Mir Qasim would later say. When the time for those battles came a few years later, the party had become too much of a power-broking instrument to take on the new doctrines that were around. Indeed, since it was now associated in people's minds with India, the National Conference's dissipate ways greatly increased Kashmir's desire for secession.

PART TWO
1982 to 1993

Blinkered Politics

The corner of Srinagar nearest the Dal was always busy by the time the 1980s rolled around, Bollywood having lyricized the romantic charms of Kashmir in technicolor. Busloads of tourists flocked there, surrounded instantly by eager sales pitches: imitation Cashmere, bright phirans, houseboats and those other, whispered services.

Behind a market beehive in that area lived Aftab, a cousin of Shabir Shah. His world was very different from his elder cousin's, for Aftab's father had as a teenager run away from his village near Anantnag. Lonely around his earnest and much older brothers, he had been unnerved at being asked to lead prayers at the local mosque one Friday when the imam had not turned up. The other worshippers were convinced the boy was well suited since the Shahs claimed Syed lineage.

This was in 1948. He had run away and found his way into the National Conference militia. The regular army accepted him later and he rose to be battalion havildar (sergeant) major in which capacity he terrorized an entire battalion for years. When Aftab was a little boy, Irish Catholic priests hired the soldier to manage discipline and security at the school they had opened to rival the Protestant mission. His contacts there with influential parents had given him a house in this fancy part of town off Dal-gate. It was 'refugee property', one of those the government held in trust—and allotted for nominal rent—until the owners, mainly the mirwaiz's well-to-do acolytes who had left soon after partition, returned from Pakistan to claim them.

Brought up at that school and touristy Dal-gate, Aftab was insulated from his cousin's radical ideas. A well-behaved boy, he preened quietly over the praise his good marks and manners earned but he was also prone to bouts of intensity. Sitting on the school steps, he would

wonder why his Abbu did not have more money, why he did not own a business. Then he would consider whether he ought to become a doctor and make lots of money, and earn everyone's respect by caring for the poor and dying.

He studied hard for two years, swaying back and forth as he squatted amid textbooks and notebooks strewn around his room. He slogged dedicatedly but so did much of Kashmir. The sons of those whom Abdullah had given land title, and Bakshi free education, hankered for the respectability of doctors and engineers. They studied night and day, but most of them had to fail.

After Aftab failed a second time in 1982, his father went to see a minister to beg him to admit Aftab. At that time, the government owned the only medical college and, given the manipulation of elections and the press, that meant ministers could get away with a lot. A proud man who had strutted ramrod straight down an inspection parade, Aftab's father hated grovelling before the minister, but he did it, for life was worthless unless one's eldest son was counted a success. It could be done, the minister—who had got the position for being his father's son—had said, if 75,000 rupees was paid. That was the bribe for medical admissions; corruption had become standardized.

Aftab cried that night. At eighteen, he was ashamed of tears but nobody could see him in the tiny splendour of his room. It was the only room on the ground floor, next to the bathroom and kitchen, and that floor was his exclusive domain after dark. His room had always felt like a cocoon but he felt bruised and vulnerable that day as he thought of his father saying morosely when he returned that he did not have so much money to invest in the admission. His father's defeated look, more than the failure of his plans, made him sob. His father too had wanted him to become a doctor and that had been more than half of Aftab's reason.

Aftab's story was a common one in the early 1980s; village boys armed with degrees had multiplied the pressure on jobs. The genetic innovations of a 'green revolution' had increased Kashmir's paddy production and dairying had been spurred by a 'white revolution'. But the sons of those who had got land through reforms were not interested in agriculture. Nor could the revival of the nineteenth-century trade in shawls, carpets and handicrafts satisfy them. Much was made of increased tourism, but it was limited to bits of Srinagar near the Dal and to two villages, Tangmarg and Pahalgam. In any case, caste-based disparagement of the boatmen's community made running a houseboat contemptible for most Kashmiris. Like Aftab, everyone wanted the respectability of a profession or a government job.

Life hung heavy for a few weeks and, on those wretched nights, Aftab's thoughts turned darkly to Pandits and Dogras. He had seen Hindu names all over the list of those who had been admitted. It had always been that way, he thought. Muslims had been unfairly treated. Hindus were favoured in India. Members of the state's public service commission in the 1980s could testify that the unwritten policy in fact favoured Muslims—and even Jammu Hindus. Pandits would otherwise have got just about every position. They routinely outscored the rest, perhaps because diligent studiousness sank into their consciousness from infancy, a pen being touched to a child's head among other rituals of New Year blessing. But if the top ten scorers in a test or interview for five appointments were Pandits, the commission generally admitted the top two and then looked for the two highest Jammu region scores and the top Kashmiri Muslim score—although the last slot quite often went to a nominee of someone powerful rather than the top Kashmiri Muslim scorer. Mrs Abdullah had once telephoned commission members to recommend a candidate while he was sitting in front of them for an interview.

Doubtless all this left both Kashmiri communities feeling wronged, Pandits for being denied what they individually merited and Muslims over the disproportionate numbers of Pandits still admitted—and both doubly wronged by the nepotism clearly at work. Much had changed since Abdullah had thrashed the Pandit who got the lecturer's job in 1930 but aspirations had multiplied much faster than opportunities. Muslim bitterness had only grown, and so had Pandit resentment.

This cycle of myopic resentment easily drew in frustrated young minds. After he had cried in the dark for a few nights, Aftab's little room began to remain lit till late. He would bring home books from the library and read—of history, of Abdullah and why he had been sent to prison, of the UN resolutions. That is when he began to get intrigued by Shabir, his cousin from Anantnag. Abbu would not talk about him, except as an upstart rapscallion who would come to no good, but Aftab slipped off to the criminal courts whenever he read in the papers that Shabir Shah was to be tried. He would hang around and watch him being led in, then slink into the enclosure where prisoners sat shackled to wait their turn at the docket. There, he

would respectfully talk to his cousin. Shabir was always effusive, his huge eyes kind.

An ember of rebellion began to smoulder in Aftab's heart during that summer of 1982.

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Indira Gandhi was slight but she had the mien of a gazelle, the hauteur of a tigress. She strode swiftly to the microphone, head held high, and the distinctive cadence of her voice rang across the ground filled with people. This was the Congress campaign's climax and it was no more the party that had collapsed amid a bizarre battle of green six years earlier. Its state unit's president, a determined man called Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, had raised it like a Phoenix and at least some of its leaders felt ready to fight the mighty National Conference head-on.

As she spoke, her head turned this way and that, reaching out. Suddenly she froze, then recovered her poise and continued—icily. A bunch of youngsters were standing near the back, mocking the world's most powerful woman. Pajamas around ankles, they stroked themselves to the rhythm of a bawdy wedding ditty. The yellow lights across the crammed park shone off ruddy-white bodies.

Indira was not amused. The memory of her father guffawing at the mirwaiz's scrawny 'goats' displaying similar naked contempt as his barge passed down the river had faded. That had been many decades ago, soon after the tribesmen had been beaten back. Nehru's notion of nation had been integrative and he had spent half an hour then explaining at Lal Chowk that he was Kashmiri. His family had been Kauls, he had said earnestly, and had lived at Agha Hamam near Habba Kadal. There had been a stream near their house, a *nehr,* and so they were called Nehru. Then he had turned to Abdullah and said he was his brother, for he too had been a Kaul once. Abdullah had sprung up, calling out a metaphysical Persian poem of Amir Khusro:

> *Man tu shudam, tu man shudi. Tu tan shudi, man jaan shudam. Tu jaan shudi, man tan shudam. Takas na goyad baad azeen, tu digari, man digaram.*

> I become you, you I. You are my body, I your life. You are my life, I your body. Let none say hereafter, I am different, you are different.

What a warm embrace had followed. But the torque that Nehru in his last days had begun to squeeze around power, his daughter had so tightened that, like blocked blood bursting skin, aspirations were gushing out across India as provincial pride.

Time and again, she had tried to push Abdullah back into the box Sadiq had cast his party into—as a unit of the Congress—but Abdullah, having recovered poise after his initial willingness in 1975, had realized that would be political suicide. Only the vigorous currents of federal politics could keep India's flag flying over such a vast land, and most certainly in his Kashmir. Does she want me to be with India or the people of Kashmir, he asked one of her messengers a little before he died.

Indira had tried even before she surged back to power in 1980. Mrs Abdullah had served Indira's envoy a lavish tea, but when the elegant MP, Hamida Habibullah, launched charmingly into her mission, Abdullah rose with a laugh, saying he would leave it to the ladies to decide. Though he campaigned for Indira that year, he did not align his party formally.

Soon after his funeral in 1982, no less epic than a Caesar's, their sons clumsily took up the dance of the persistent and the elusive. Indira's heir Rajiv tried to meet Abdullah's inheritor Farooq to forge a political alliance but Farooq remained elusive. His cadre would not brook the idea of supporting the Congress to contest even one of the valley's forty-two assembly seats, leave alone the ten that Congress leaders had suggested to National Conference leader Pyare Lal Handoo.

Indira's party was already churning, grappling disjointedly for direction. When it could not wrest an alliance, it projected itself during the 1983 assembly elections as defender of the Hindus and the National Conference as the refuge of Muslims.

The communal antagonism that assembly campaign spewed had so crystallized by the time Parliament elections were held the next year, 1984, that many Pandits were not allowed to vote. T.N. Ganjoo, a Pandit lecturer of Habba Kadal, was sweetly asked by National

Conference workers why he had taken the trouble to come to the booth; they had already cast his vote.

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Aftab loved his green T-shirt. A pastel shade, it suited his fair skin and looked dashing with blue jeans. There was a spring in his step as he loped to the canteen after classes whenever he wore that T-shirt. Patting his long curls into place, he would walk with a smile, straight to the table at which the college union president sat with his hangers-on. The union president was a bit of a ruffian but had taken a liking to the well-spoken freshman during the early weeks of ragging. And Aftab felt good being around the important man. Now that he had given up on a medical career, he knew he could breeze through college. And the virus of politics had crept into him during those lonely nights of crying and reading.

When the union president dispatched Aftab to bring bottles of cola for his friends, Aftab did not mind. He would sit quietly with them for a while, listening with a grin to their brash talk of girls and motorcycles but would excuse himself before the older boys tired of him. Still walking on air, he would go down the road to Lal Chowk and cross the bridge to the tea stall across the bustling square that led to Hari Singh High Street. Crammed with traffic and jostling people, it was one of the busiest squares in the city and nobody gave the gaggle of teenagers that gathered there on most afternoons for tea and politics a second glance.

Azam Inquilabi by now had a job as a science teacher but came there whenever he could. Undeterred from the revolutionary role in which he had cast himself, he held forth at the tea stall on jihad and freedom. He always gave Aftab a warm smile when he walked in. He thought of Aftab's intelligent, cultured mien as properly Islamic, oblivious to the fact that the boy had acquired sophistication from a school run by Irish Catholic priests. Aftab would look around with a bright smile as he wedged himself onto a bench, often sidling in beside burly Ishfaq, who at least knew his claim to fame.

It was Ishfaq who had taken the initiative to know him, having seen him often at the tea stall. Aftab had been crossing the bridge towards Lal Chowk one afternoon when he had seen Ishfaq approaching,

wearing the bright green striped tie of the mission school. Striding straight to Aftab, he had shaken his hand and asked directly whether he was Shabir Shah's cousin. Aftab had flushed at first but, recovering poise as he realized he had nothing to fear, had said 'Yes'. Ishfaq's grin had widened as he quickly followed up, asking whether Shabir was also Aftab's leader. This time, Aftab's affirmation had been more assertive. Aftab would never forget the thrill he had felt as Ishfaq's arms flew wide and embraced him tightly. Ishfaq kissed him on each cheek and then on his forehead. It was almost veneration, and from a boy whom Aftab had always been wary of at the tea stall.

Ishfaq Majid Wani was his full name and he was a force to reckon with between that bridge and Bakshi Stadium, enforcing his will with fists and cycle chains like Amitabh Bachchan in a Bollywood blockbuster. He made it his job to beat to a pulp any lout who dared get fresh with a girl of his locality, and if he was in an expansive mood, a Muslim beggar might find himself fed like a prince. Ishfaq belonged to a middle class family and his father would acknowledge that, though he had worked for the National Conference, he had joined it in the early years after partition only to protect his family's land from redistribution. At heart, he hated the party's socialism.

As the teenagers sat listening to Azam, Ishfaq's eyes often blazed like coals. Infused with Islamic zeal by men like Maulvi Mutheruddin—who some said had come from Bangladesh—at the Iqra mosque a stone's throw from Bakshi Stadium, Ishfaq would deliberately break crockery and bend cutlery at the Hindu-owned Shakti Sweets. At the tea stall, Azam took that 'us against them' indoctrination further with international fervour. The young grasp at stairways to Utopia but Iran had now brought paradise to earth and Afghanistan was expanding its domain. Azam would ignore Pakistan's role in fuelling the Afghan jihad, however. His eyes shone with zeal for Pakistan even after his eight-month torture fifteen years ago, and he had told a court as recently as 1982: '*Deen hamara, imaan hamara. Kashmir banega Pakistan* (Our religion, our faith. Kashmir will become Pakistan).' But, although he was treated with more respect when he had taken on the rigours of the crossing again in 1983, he had, like Maqbool Butt before, returned from Pakistan converted to the idea of an independent Kashmir. He had got to know the Jammu and Kashmir National Liberation Front—which Butt had helped found in 1965—but, insecure among the leftist

intellectual pretensions of its many leaders, he devoted himself to the valley-based Freedom Front instead. A lone comrade of Abdullah had valiantly floated it when Abdullah had wound up the Plebiscite Front.

If Azam did not valorize Pakistan at the tea stall, he did not criticize it either. For he knew that most of the boys were Pakistani at heart. Many of them had smuggled Pakistani flags into the stands when India played a cricket match against the West Indies at the stadium opposite Aftab's old school in the fall of 1983. Waving them wildly, they hurled rotten fruit, eggs, tomatoes and lusty abuse at the Indian team. One of the radically Islamist boys had decided to halt the match altogether. A short man from Batmaloo, everyone called him Guga, though his name was Mushtaq Ahmed Bhat. His large eyes radiated religious fervour, especially when he spoke passionately of radical Islamic movements in Egypt, Lebanon or Iran. Guga primed the studiously Islamist Shakeel Bakshi, another Batmaloo boy, to rush onto the field with him as soon as the first wicket fell. Guga had planned that they would dig up the pitch, yelling that they wanted a plebiscite. When the wicket fell, Guga rose but Shakeel was apparently in a funk. The moment passed and a furious Guga poured contempt on Shakeel all morning before scampering across the field at lunch to dig as much as he could before the police stopped him.

Poor Farooq Abdullah: Guga's passionate little protest was projected in New Delhi as his doing. He was thumbing his nose at Indira, his detractors whispered. He was playing both sides, they alleged conspiratorially.

The air was thick with political intrigue. At Indira's house one day a few months after that match, two distinguished visitors sat tensely silent, waiting for the prime minister. Quietly elegant, her drawing room was Spartan considering the power she wielded. But neither of them had eyes for the décor. Not only had each been there often, their mission this afternoon was crucial. The governor of Jammu and Kashmir looked ill. He was Indira's cousin but far too overawed to dare confront her. He had only come today because P.N. Haksar had agreed to come along. A straightforward man, Haksar had resigned as her principal secretary when Indira's younger son had begun to rule the roost.

She breezed in, her tiny frame exuding power, and nodded to the men, before sitting primly at the edge of an armchair, hands clasped in her lap, back erect, head bent slightly to listen. No smile. She was not going to put them at ease. The poor governor crumpled silently and it was left to Indira's former aide to speak. He was forthright, saying quite plainly that any move to remove Farooq would be disastrous. His voice was firm, for he knew this appeal was a last-ditch exercise. A coup was already in the works.

It was the beginning of a malevolent year, 1984, and a cabal of apparatchiks whose notion of national interest was formed by the maxim 'Indira is India' had pressed fiercely for a coup since that obscene election campaign in July 1983. Out of Farooq's reluctance to ally with the Congress, they had conjured a spectre of sedition. When he tried to make peace with the mirwaiz, they whispered darkly that he was getting close to Pakistanis. When he weighed in at a series of rallies with opposition leaders who together posed a strong challenge to Indira's government, they called him a traitor. When Guga dug up the pitch, they crowed that it was Farooq's handiwork.

It was easy for Indira to convince herself that she had erred in letting him succeed his father, for she felt that she had held the key in choosing him over his brother-in-law, G.M. Shah. Even Abdullah had once thumped his forehead and cried out in her presence that the boy never took anything seriously. This was when he had just discovered that, instead of delivering Abdullah's message to Indira, Farooq had gone on to Bangalore from Delhi airport with a glamorous actress he had met on the flight from Srinagar. Farooq had sent a friend to deliver the cherries that were meant to sweeten the message: three boxes for Indira and one each for her aides, R.K. Dhawan and the Pandit, Fotedar.

Indira nevertheless held off the coup for a while after Haksar's urging. You don't take risks with Kashmir, one of her staff would remember her saying. But after a couple of months, she went ahead with the plan to instal Abdullah's son-in-law. Congress factotums, managed by the owner of a Srinagar hotel, lured a bunch of Farooq's legislators to switch loyalty. Half a dozen at least lunged at the chance, for having been Abdullah's ministers, they had been left out in the cold by Farooq.

The governor did what he could to stave it off, giving Farooq a chance to face a vote of no confidence when the splitters first went

to him. But that only left the well-meaning old man with egg on his face. Instead of waiting for the motion of no confidence, Farooq took a hurried vote of confidence—when his detractors had walked out of the House to protest a questionable ruling by the Speaker. Soon after, Indira replaced the governor with a town-planner known for getting things done. Farooq went to see her while she was visiting Leh in June but she was coldly unresponsive. The coup to dislodge him from power was executed a few days later.

Kashmir erupted in protest. Curfew Raj was the new government's name and Indira soon realized she had made a mistake. When it became completely untenable, Farooq's brother-in-law was dismissed and the town-planner governor was directly handed the reins. Jagmohan, charmer of the world, was the only name he used but he was opinionated and blinkered, ill-equipped to comprehend the chimerical complexities of Kashmir's nature.

These mistakes were motivated by political calculations that focussed on the power and stability of Indira's regime, oblivious to the socio-economic frustrations of young Kashmiris and the Islamic consciousness wafting in from Iran and Afghanistan. All these factors spurred the process that turned boys like Aftab from students into insurgents. Factors other than geopolitics and politics too contributed, even entertainment.

One evening, Aftab was carried out of the cinema in a silent human wave that burst in foaming anger into the dusk outside. A few posters of Abdullah were pasted there and some of the boys tore them, yelling abuse as they clawed. A match was thrown onto a pile and soon there was a little bonfire, as if refuse was being disposed of.

Art can spark revolution when it touches certain chords and Kashmir's effervescent emotions were easily touched. Aftab's classmates had been raving about the film *Omar Mukhtar: Lion of the Desert* which, dubbed in Urdu, had opened the previous Friday. But he had not expected it to fire his passions as much as it did. Like most of those who saw it in Kashmir, he was gripped as the film unfolded, his breathing becoming steadily heavier until, towards the end, he had taken out his handkerchief and buried his eyes.

The hero was an old man with a protruding nose, a little like Abdullah's. His face was craggier and his eyes grey but he still resembled the Lion of Kashmir. He was even a schoolteacher like Abdullah had once been, and he fought for the people's freedom—to the end, without making deals for power and lucre.

There was a swagger in the step of some of the boys who had reduced Abdullah's image to ashes while darkness quietly spread. Abdullah's rival legatees' scramble for power was in full swing but, to the boys fired by *Omar Mukhtar*, they were all scummy agents of profane subjugation. The film was pulled after its first jam-packed week but it had worked its magic. The tea stall discussions became more fiery, the boys now eager for insurrection.

Some of them had already dabbled uncertainly with fire, filling petrol in a bottle and hurling it at a police jeep on 11 February 1984—to protest Maqbool Butt's hanging in New Delhi early that morning. They were disappointed, though, for that little arson was more or less the extent of Srinagar's response. Even Radio Pakistan's main bulletin that night did not mention the hanging. Sopore downed shutters, and the north, closer to Butt's village—but Kashmir for the most part went about its business. Even at the university, no more than a hundred students joined a procession to mark the fortieth day after Butt's death.

But if the tea stall boys were isolated sparks, they had zest. They enthusiastically supported the People's League, which brought together many of the incipient insurgents of the 1960s. It was by no means a mass movement, for it was still dominated by conservative 'goats' or former landlords, or the sort of first-generation professional that was also drawn to the Jamaat. Shabir Shah's now iconic profile was a strong magnet but the League's leaders reserved membership to those with fifteen years of political struggle behind them. Mid-life is tough. Still convinced that they were young, they spent more time outmanoeuvring each other than fighting India.

The boys' link to the League was Mehmood Sagar, the owner of the tea stall. He was a member of the League, and a friend of Shabir's. Soon after *Omar Mukhtar* had fired their enthusiasm, Mehmood told the boys he wanted them to meet an outstanding preacher. Closing the stall early one evening, he took them all to Chhanapora, off the road to the airport. They squatted happily on the carpet in a large room and sipped from little mugs of tea, chatting quietly while they waited.

Most of them had heard of the cleric they were to meet, Syed Abdullah Shirazi. He preached at the Ahle-hadis mosque at Gowkadal, the Bridge of the Cow, on Fridays and boys from that area said his sermons had a sublime passion. The mosque was always packed and people squatted on the street outside to listen to him over the loudspeaker.

For the most part, Kashmir had turned up its nose at the reformist Ahle-hadis. Life was nothing without ambivalent options and the Ahle-hadis—much like Saudi Wahhabism in doctrinal content—left no scope for greys. The Quran and the Prophet's example had to be followed to the letter, nor should there be any intermediary between a believer and God. No feudal patriarchs such as the mirwaiz, leave alone Kashmir's favourite mystics. Indeed, to such reformists, begging favours at graves was heresy. Finally, after a century of unsuccessful efforts, zeal generated by Iran's revolution and the jihad in Afghanistan had allowed visiting missionaries and young converts to consolidate the sect in pockets of Kashmir during the early 1980s—and to mould some of the tea stall boys. Abdul Rashid Tahiri, a leading light of Kashmir's Ahle-hadis who happened to be a neighbour of Guga, had sparked in the boy a quest for a new Caliphate—as had the Bengali cleric, Maulvi Mutheruddin.

Shirazi was a young man, though older of course than most of the boys there. He smiled warmly and bent his head as he went around the room to embrace each one and wish him peace. Then he sat down and asked some of them a little about themselves before launching into a soul-stirring talk on the great mission that God meant them for. The boys were very impressed and, when their host, Mehmood Sagar, proposed that they form an organization that would struggle for Islam to flower gloriously, they readily agreed. Shabir had recently been arrested again and they were all charged up. Sagar suggested the preacher be their president, and that too the boys happily accepted. They decided to call themselves the Islamic Students' League and had some meetings over the next few weeks to chalk out plans. One was held near the Idgah, at the house of another People's League leader, another at a suburb across the river from Lal Chowk.

Feeling like an undercover film hero, Aftab threw his head back as he glanced surreptitiously around whenever he approached a meeting, to make sure he was not being followed. They were careful about whom they brought along too. The obvious place to look for comrades was among those who pelted stones during demonstrations

but most of those were ruffians—inner city boys or blue-collar workers. For their group, they wanted the varnish of education, the passion of religiosity. So, until 1986, the Islamic Students' League had no more than a couple of dozen members.

They talked more than they did at that stage. Their chief was after all a preacher. After a few months, Aslam Malik, a tall, thin, college freshman was selected secretary but he was too sickly to lead. Too scared as well. He was smart and intensely dedicated but, after a childhood spent in the countryside, his eyes still widened involuntarily at the dinning bustle of the city. His bus driver father had moved a few years earlier to the drivers' den north of Lal Chowk and the boy kept moodily to himself among the city slicks, talking in monosyllables when he had to. The more macho fellows would rib him in school, making him smile shyly as he grimaced inside each time they made fun of the days he had spent modelling, striking poses on a shikara. Poor Aslam. So desperate was he to get away from that effeminate persona that he changed his name to Yasin. Yasin Malik.

From those meetings filled with insecure adolescence, 'Lipton' tea and unctuous talk of heaven, Aftab took back elevated notions that felt a little like serenity. A part of him, though, remained restless for action—to change the world, make it a better place, as God wanted. He was already on the fringes of student politics from hanging around the union president. In fact, he had thrown himself so enthusiastically into union filibustering that the principal had threatened him with rustication even in his first year at college. With that activism under his belt, Aftab got a couple of friends from the Students' League together to plan what they could do. They sat on the lawns, racking their brains over tea and soft drinks through several balmy afternoons before Aftab had a brainwave. Ever since he could remember, knots of men had sat in the sun on the grassy slope of the hill with the temple on top, not far from his house, smoking languidly as they dealt packs of cards, generally for money. Gambling was evil, he told the other boys earnestly, and they had to set things right. So they turned up on the slope one day with sticks, yelling at the men to stop. There were only five of them but they kicked up such chaos, running and shouting and waving their arms, that the men scattered in panic. Whooping at their success, they lit a bonfire of the cards that had been left strewn around the grass.

Bucked up, they decided that, having defeated gambling, they ought to fight drugs next. Deciding to publicize their efforts this time, they persuaded a *Srinagar Times* photographer to go along. Aftab had heard his uncle, who lived in Batmaloo, say disgustedly that drug addicts hung around the place. Four of the boys prowled its warren of narrow lanes one afternoon, photographer in tow. A couple of others were ready to give up by the time Aftab spotted a lean, droopy-eyed fellow. Whispering excitedly that the fellow looked like a junkie, he walked up to him before the others could reply, fishing in his pocket as he went. Flashing a five-rupee note, he told the man he could have it if he brought them some brown sugar. Then he added that he would give him more money, much more, if the stuff was good.

The fellow looked shiftily right and left, suspecting a trap, but then his eyes settled on the money. Snatching it, he told Aftab to wait there. When he had turned the corner, Aftab beckoned the others and they scurried after, a little distance behind their quarry. The man looked back a couple of times but the other three screened Aftab. The man stopped finally near a cigarette kiosk at which a slick fellow with long hair and tight jeans was lounging, smoking a cigarette. The man went straight up to him and whispered. The four stalkers crept closer and when the dealer took out a little cellophane pouch from inside his leather jacket sprinted across to collar him. One of them grabbed the addict too, cowering now in fright, but Aftab gave him a stern lecture on the evil of drugs and told him to run. Then the foursome dragged the dealer to the police station nearby and proudly announced that they had captured a drug peddler. The photographer clicked several pictures.

Batmaloo became their theatre of operations. It felt like home. The fire of 1965—which locals were sure the army had lit to smoke out infiltrators during the war that year—had steeled Batmaloo's pro-Pakistan sentiments. While walking aimlessly one afternoon, discussing their moral goals, one of Aftab's companions nudged him and pointed towards a little building. At first, he could not make out what he was supposed to notice. It was an ordinary enough building. Then, suddenly, the words on the rotting board with peeling paint struck him. It was a communist library—established no doubt when Qara was young. Over the next few days, they made a plan and set fire to the place. A few days later, they set fire again, this time at the bigger communist library at Lal Chowk. They felt very good.

Guga lived in Batmaloo and they often dropped in at his house. He nodded when they told him what they had done, but did not smile. Aftab asked what the matter was, getting flustered at his cold response and repeating that it had been a communist centre, the devil's work. Guga nodded and looked up with a wan smile to say that that was why he had not objected, but he had been upset at this business of burning books. Hilal, one of the other boys, had mentioned his plan to burn the library at Sri Pratap College, Guga said, and that had deeply upset him. That would be very foolish, he told Aftab. For knowledge was the first thing in Islam. The first word the Angel Gabriel had uttered when he had delivered the Quran to the Prophet was, 'Read'.

Guga had not been educated in prestigious schools but Aftab found himself drawn to his simple piety, the aura of serenity that rose from passionate commitment to the unalterably linear path of God's purpose for His people. Guga's face shone lustrous when he spoke of the Iranian revolution, calling it the best of that century—though not as complete as it should have been. Then he would point to Ayatullah Khomeini's advice that one must not be a slave to either East or West. His face shone even brighter when he spoke of martyrs such as Hasn-ul Bana of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood.

Aftab was eager to match Guga's radiant devotion. Many of his classmates smirked whenever they saw him approach but put on sweet smiles. They knew he would offer them colas as long as they listened for a while to passionate talk of Islam and Pakistan and seizing their destinies. They thought he was a little touched in the head but pretty harmless. Aftab knew his classmates were bemused by him but zeal is its own reward. At such moments, he pitied their mundane lives, untouched by God. On days when he knew Shabir was to appear, he would go to the courts on the other side of Lal Chowk, walking on air. His life had a higher purpose.

He was constantly on the lookout to get other students involved and opportunity sometimes came out of the blue. As he was walking nonchalantly into college one morning, one of his comrades from the Islamic Students' League ran up, asking breathlessly if he had seen the paper. Aftab grabbed the Urdu daily, *Vadi ki Awaaz*, he was waving. A picture purporting to be that of the Prophet had been published in a magazine somewhere abroad, it said.

That's sacrilege, Aftab shouted, his hand flying up to cover his mouth as his eyes swivelled to see his comrades' reaction. Working themselves up to a frenzy, the boys went around the classrooms waving the paper and shouting that they were not Muslims if they let this insult pass. Many of the students were slightly amused but quite willing to be carried along. No one wanted to be thought less devout. And it was a chance to skip class and maybe have some fun.

The League boys and some of the union leaders quickly got them into a procession, which they led to the main road and turned right towards Lal Chowk. Their slogans moved smoothly from Islamic to political—'*Islam zindabad*', Long live Islam; '*Nara-e-Taqbir, Allah-o-Akbar*'; '*Shah, Shah, Shabir Shah, Kashmir ka shah-en-shah, Shabir Shah, Shabir Shah*', Kashmir's emperor is Shabir Shah. The leaders yelled their lungs out but they were only a score or so. The rest responded to the Islamic slogans but petered out after a while.

Aftab was happiest after such demonstrations. He was eager to change the world, not just talk. Sometimes, he would join a stone-pelting mob, for it pushed a greater surge of teenage testosterone than yelling slogans. One morning, a group of boys lurked with a pile of stones in the lanes beside a bridge the governor's car was to cross. When it did, they hurled furiously, then took to their heels down the alleys before the security escort could figure out where the assault had come from.

Some of the other Islamic Students' League boys were more politically inclined. Naeem Khan, for one. Descended from a family of Pathan settlers, his father had been an Indian Army officer until he took premature retirement to push the work of the Plebiscite Front. So Naeem had, as a boy, seen Al Fatah at home.

Shirazi agreed to hand the presidency to Naeem in 1986 and under the bustling young man with a hearty grip and an ever-ready grin the group became more dynamic. When they decided to organize a procession to mark the Prophet's birth anniversary late that year, they planned meticulously, instead of rounding up college students at the last moment. A group of them went to visit Ali Shah Geelani, who had just been released from jail. The boy whom Masoodi had once adopted had blazed a fiery trail as a member of the assembly and was an icon for the boys. Then they went to call on the Srinagar chief of the Jamaat. Like Geelani, he hailed from the class of Syeds, many of whom had lost social and economic clout after 1947.

Both were leading lights of the Jamaat's activist fringe. Saduddin had tried, after the assaults of 1979 shattered his puritanical cocoon, to lead the Jamaat out of the quagmire of politics, but these two had resisted. Nor were they isolated. Geelani in fact was sure he had majority support in the Jamaat's shoura when the rules of election were changed in 1985 and a limited electoral college voted for Geelani's relatively apolitical rival to succeed Saduddin while Geelani was in jail.

Having secured Geelani's approval, the boys worked feverishly to mobilize their classmates and friends, even going from house to house to ask people to join in celebrating the Prophet's birthday. They worked animatedly for days, painting banners and placards. The procession was to assemble at the park where Indira had been insulted three years earlier and wind its way to the shrine at which Abdullah and six others had been chosen to represent Kashmir to the maharaja half a century before.

On the morning of the festival, they turned up early at the field, eyes bursting. Nervously, they asked each other how many were coming as they put out the banners and placards and bundled some Pakistan flags into a bus, in case they got a chance to wave them in the inner city. Blood was soon racing in their veins. A huge crowd gathered and thousands of women and men cheered from myriad windows as the procession began to move.

The Jamaat was rarely permitted public demonstrations and the leaders of its activist fringe made the most of this opportunity. Jamaat's district chief hoisted himself heavily on top of the bus. His husky, high-pitched voice bellowed into a hand-held loudspeaker to the stomp of thousands of feet: '*Zal-zala hai kufr ke aivaanon mein, lo mujahid aa gaye maidanon mein.*' The palaces of idolatry are trembling, for God's warriors are in the field.

In 1986, it was still just a fiery slogan, but circumstances were coming together that would make it reality within the next couple of years. The Congress' obsession with sharing power in the state government had so unsettled the already effete National Conference that neither the Union nor the state government had even begun to grapple with either the burgeoning resentment of the people or the rise of Islamic fervour among a section of young Kashmiris.

{12}

Islamic Mobilization

Fifty-five years after Islamic identity had galvanized Kashmir to explode, it was effervescent again—*Omar Mukhtar*, the tremors from Afghanistan and the Iranian revolution having cracked the bottle into which Abdullah had stuffed that most powerful potion: religious identity. It had trickled out even before he had died, its unctuous vapours filling the air with heady visions one day in 1982 in the hall of Jehangir Hotel, cheek by jowl with the assembly. The Islami Jamiat-e-Tulaba, the students' wing that the Jamaat had set up to counter Darwin, had organized a Wahadat, or Unity, conference. In the chair was Fazl-ul Haq Qureshi, who had begun as a member of the Muslim Youth Federation in the early 1960s and then become the first president of the People's League. At this meeting, fervour for the transnational mobilization of an Islamic identity fused with the passion of those who wished for Kashmir's merger with Pakistan. Their zeal frightened the older leaders, though. Even Geelani reined in the youthful Tulaba chief, Sheikh Tajimul Islam.

But the passions swirling in the latter were like the unstoppable wind that had swept across the world in the 1980s bearing the slogan '*Iran se khabar aayee, Shia–Sunni bhai bhai*'. The message from Iran of Shias and Sunnis as brothers was reinforced when Ayatollah Ali Khameini, who had since become Iran's supreme leader, led a joint congregation of Kashmir's Shias and Sunnis for prayers in Srinagar. As it happened, the Imam of Ka'aba, the pivot of the earth, was in the city the same day. It was heady stuff, this Islamic unity. '*La sharkhiya, la gharbiya, Islamia, Islamia*'—'Not east, not west, only Islam'—they shouted at Srinagar street corners.

Religious or nationalist passion often leads to chauvinism. Some Muslims had stopped eating with Hindus and there had been fewer

saris on Srinagar's streets since the late 1970s. Muslim girls even at the Melhanson mission school had begun to cover their heads with scarves and Pandit girls in some Srinagar areas were harassed unless they followed suit. And Kashmir, which had known little of the world beyond Punjab when Ali Sheikh was a boy, had been torn by vandals for a month after Jerusalem's Al Aqsa mosque had been damaged.

Sister organizations of Vajpayee's party had been conducive to this Islamic mobilization. They were heftily stirring a cauldron of Hindu passions against a mosque that the first Mughal had built at the spot they considered the birthplace of Lord Rama. When Jammu's Muslims demonstrated against that campaign in February 1986, the police battered them, and united Muslims across the state.

The whole place was beginning to smell precariously like 1931 but, though temples were stoned, no one bothered. Hari Singh had tried valiantly to reach out to his people then but Jagmohan, who now held the reins, closed a little mosque in a corner of the secretariat and banned meat on Janmashtami. The burly Qazi Nisar, who had brought aggressive religiosity along with his degree from Aligarh to become Anantnag's most popular preacher, promptly slaughtered a sheep in Anantnag that day and the polarization was complete.

The last incident at least could easily have been averted. Javaid Makhdoomi, a police officer whose family had, twenty-seven generations before him, become custodian of a shrine that Srinagar revered as highly as any other, had persuaded the Qazi in April 1986 to accept a lecturer's post, with accommodation, at Kashmir University. Makhdoomi explained to Jagmohan's office that there would have been no Lion of Kashmir if Justice Berjor Dalal had arranged a scholarship when Abdullah had asked for one in 1931. Makhdoomi was told to get an application from the Qazi. He did. It was rejected.

Earlier, G.M. Shah, Farooq's brother-in-law, had summarily sacked nine government employees with Islamist leanings. One of them became the nucleus for Islamist political mobilization. His house in the little village of Botengu, not far from Sopore, was a world apart from the Round Room. But it was there that a second maelstrom began to churn. To flag a link with Kashmir's eruption in 1931, he convened a meeting of Islamists on 13 July 1986, Martyrs' Day.

The host this time was no pir. Indeed he was a Jamaat sympathizer, although not a member, and was committed to Kashmir's merger

with Pakistan. His name was Abdul Ghani Bhat and, since he drew the highest grade of pay at the Sopore degree college, everyone called him Professor. Professor had as much political savvy as Pir Maqbool, though, and his success in getting Kashmir's key Muslim leaders together for this meeting was no less than the shrine custodian's. Ghulam Mohammed Bhat, Saduddin's successor as Jamaat chief, sat heavily beside him. Burly Qazi Nisar from Anantnag was also there. Abbas Ansari sat smiling watchfully in the middle. He was the Shia preacher who had tried to run the action committee after Abdullah had confronted the mirwaiz soon after the relic had been recovered. Today, again, he slipped into the role of convener.

Some of the nine sacked employees had initially called themselves the Muslim Employees' Front. Now they decided to marry that name with the one Ansari had given a grouping of various outfits sometime earlier, the People's United Front. Why not call ourselves the Muslim United Front, Professor suggested. Setting an agenda for the organization was trickier than naming it, but wily Professor veered around that with ease. Let all who recite the primary kalima forget everything else and make that the focus, he suggested, bending forward no doubt with hands tucked into his phiran, a smile dancing across the beaked nose between his hooded eyes. The others nodded sagely. *La ilaha illallah* would be their bedrock. Who could argue against that? Certainly not the nineteen gathered in that room.

Once the alienation of Islamist leaders had been followed by their unification at Botengu, they got down to tactics. The Muslim United Front went public with a joint procession for the Shia mourning ritual on the tenth day of the first month, Moharram. It was ironic, Sunnis joining in mourning the first victims of Sunnis, but it was exhilarating too. A few weeks later, the Front's leaders participated in the procession on the Prophet's birth anniversary, striding behind the Islamic Students' League. Boys like Aftab had paved the way for the older men, just as the Reading Room Party had in 1930 for the Muslim Conference.

The timing was perfect then for the Muslim United Front when Farooq Abdullah made a sudden announcement towards the end of 1986: a fresh assembly would be elected two and a half years ahead of schedule. Farooq had returned to power a couple of months earlier at the head of a coalition, for the Congress had thrust back its support

a decade after haughtily whipping it away. Having spurned the Congress' overtures while he had power, Farooq bent over for it now, deputing Jammu leaders like Mangat Ram Sharma and Janak Raj Gupta to explore the possibility. Common friends of Farooq and Rajiv Gandhi—including journalist–MP M.J. Akbar, Vijay, a scion of the Dhar family, and Mumbai industrialist Nusli Wadia—had done their bit.

Farooq's lodestar henceforth would be constant: he would align his party with whoever held power in Delhi. The shock of having the rug pulled from under him had brought him around to his father's later policy—but without the subtlety, the histrionic jugglery, or any tactician a tenth as wily as Masoodi. The Congress wanted a share in power. So almost immediately the clumsy twosome decided to tango all the way to the hustings.

The Muslim United Front's leaders had no time to celebrate the dawn of what was to be a critical year, for they argued right through New Year's Eve and the first day of 1987. At Botengu, Professor and the Jamaat chief, Ghulam Mohammed Bhat, had ensured that contesting elections would be among the group's aims. Now the group had to decide whether to plunge in. More than twice the number that had been at Professor's house on Martyrs' Day were at Baramula for the New Year meeting and the debate was heated.

A few of the Islamic Students' League boys had come and Yasin Malik asserted strongly that their task was to fight, not debate in an assembly. But Professor's glittering eyes and metaphorical rhetoric bested him. When the rest remained at loggerheads, Professor crafted an ambiguous press release. When some newspapers reported that the nascent group had decided to contest, public reaction was so enthusiastic that the matter was clinched.

They turned next to expanding their ranks with groups beyond the Jamaat that had mass support and electoral experience. Farooq's brother-in-law, who had rediscovered the virtues of Islam after losing the reins, turned up at the next meeting—to be interviewed. The other applicant was Abdul Ghani Lone, who had set up his own party, the People's Conference, after the Janata Party had broken up. Geelani had by now joined his rival, the Jamaat chief, at these meetings, his peaked Karakuli and distinguished dark shervani a sartorial contrast to Saduddin—who had once turned down an invitation from the

chief of the Delhi-based Jamaat only because his single shervani was frayed. Geelani looked dourly down his nose to wag a finger at Farooq's brother-in-law. Generally the soul of curtness, the candidate fidgeted, swallowed and apologized but Geelani launched into a harangue. No explanations from this man could ever satisfy him. For it was on 6 March 1985, the last day he had been chief minister, that Geelani had been arrested in Sopore—and his rival elected Jamaat chief by a limited electoral college in his absence.

Ansari tried to moderate, aware that the two interviewees were the only ones with enough ballast to prevent the Jamaat from taking over the nascent grouping. Ansari's mother was in hospital though, on her deathbed, and he was urgently summoned there even as he spoke. So the meeting shifted to the Jamaat office and only Lone was admitted. When Ansari returned after mourning his mother, the group turned to other potential members. The Muslim United Front invited the Anjuman-e-Shariat, run by the Agha family of Budgam, which had the largest feudal influence among the valley's Shias. But the Aghas had accommodated the National Conference since the days when Sheikh Abdullah had turned a blind eye to its qazi court rulings that tillers ought not to accept land forcibly taken from Shia landlords who approached that court (they ruled it *najayaz*, improper, although not *haraam*, sinful). Now, the family—still careful to protect the vast land they had been given when the Dogras were eager to win over the insecure Shia minority through them—fielded a son, Mehdi Hasan, in concert with the ruling party.

The Front next turned to the mirwaiz, the Abdullah family's long-standing opponent. He still had the large old mansion in the inner city but had shifted to a plush modern bungalow close to the idyllic Nagin. A group of Front leaders went there late one dark evening to persuade him to join. He listened patiently, nodding agreeably, and they were sure he was on board when they left in the early hours. In the morning, he made an announcement: his Awami Action Committee would contest the elections in alliance with Farooq's National Conference. The Double Farooq accord, everyone called it, for the mirwaiz too was named Farooq.

That announcement amazed many but actually Farooq Abdullah had reached out to the 'goats' even during his father's last days and

the two groups had voted together for the first time to elect a 'goat', Abdul Rashid Kabuli, to India's Parliament in the by-election after Farooq vacated the seat to become chief minister. The pact had been in place during the 1983 assembly elections too. It had worked then, for it was arranged the Kashmiri way, covertly—and the catharsis caused by Abdullah's death had been fresh. In 1987, however, the mirwaiz discovered that his 'goats' might be willing to die for him but not to openly back the discredited National Conference. Some leading 'goats' worked against his candidates and the mirwaiz had to return home somewhat earlier than planned when he ventured out to campaign.

The Muslim United Front had its share of hiccups too. Lone and the Jamaat—which insisted on fielding no less than thirty of the group's forty-two nominees—set up candidates against each other across the north. The Front nevertheless captivated the city. And, through Qazi Nisar, part of Anantnag district too. Their opening campaign salvo was dramatic. Forty candidates lined up behind the plethora of Islamists on a large rostrum in the same park where Indira had been shown flesh, only this time all the candidates were covered from head to toe—in shrouds. Kashmir, which loves theatrical gestures, tumbled out to cheer and the Front's leaders were soon convinced that they would fare well on Pakistan Day. That was the icing on their cake: India's Election Commission had fixed polling for 23 March 1987, the day in 1940 on which the Muslim League had resolved to settle for nothing less than a separate nation.

They loved Pakistan, Professor told a campaign meeting, buoyed by the ebullience before him. His eyes glittered as his index finger went up and his head sinuously down. Then someone tugged his phiran from behind and whispered, the way Abdullah once had with Masoodi at Pratap Park. Words never failed Professor. Quintessentially Kashmiri, he added smoothly that that did not mean they did not love India too.

The boys of the Islamic Students' League were not so smooth. For weeks, they had been in a tizzy. Yasin had agreed that they would campaign for the Muslim United Front and, though he had steadfastly refused to field candidates, Guga and his loyal band were incensed at having anything to do with Indian elections. Guga having become a guru for him, Aftab went along with the anti-elections argument.

Yasin too had a guru by then: Ishfaq—whose heart smouldered with a passion to right the wrong of his father's long years of managing constituency work for a major National Conference leader. After heated arguments between the boys almost led to blows, they decided to ask for their icon's advice. Since Shabir was in jail, they asked his brother to check on their behalf. The brother, who was to be a Muslim United Front candidate, turned up a few days later to say Shabir wanted them to campaign for the Front.

Ishfaq and his chums crowed but Guga was not satisfied. Armed with a questionnaire and a letter from an Urdu weekly, *Chattan*, he marched off to interview Shabir in jail. The icon told him he did not think participating in elections would serve their purpose. Now it was the turn of Guga's backers to yell victory. But that did no good. The others preferred to go by the icon's brother's word. Arguments became more furious and Guga was so incensed one day that he banged Naeem Khan's table hard enough to tip over a glass of water. In a fit of rage, he then swept the papers off the desk and stomped out—with Aftab and his band of loyal friends in tow.

The Islamic Students' League had split.

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Only a few members, mainly blinkered Batmaloo boys overawed by Guga's pan-Islamic rhetoric, left the Islamic Students' League. The rest campaigned passionately for Muslim United Front candidates in the 1987 elections. Perhaps, if their candidates had managed to get elected to the assembly, their zeal would have found vent through democratic channels. Whether that would have happened remains an academic question, however. For, elections in some constituencies were ham-handedly rigged and the Amira Kadal constituency, in which most of the Islamic Students' League boys campaigned, was among the most shameful.

The National Conference candidate there was one of its senior-most leaders. His pale skin stretched like parchment on either side of a pointed, protruding nose on a head that weighed down on a squat frame. On the night after polling, he shuffled into a police station as fast as a steam engine, his nostrils flaring. All the policemen sprang

up and some senior police officers who happened to be at that station scurried in, saluting, but the man had no eyes for them. Demanding where that *bhangi* was, he launched into a tirade of filthy abuse. Bhangi was used for the lowest of the low in India's caste hierarchy and syncretistic Kashmiri Islam held on to its contempt.

Hamid Sheikh, who lay in a corner of the thick-barred detention room, bleeding from the policemen's thrashing—routine for any detainee—was roughly hauled out before the squat man. Red now, and panting, the man slipped off his shoe and hit Hamid on the head. A couple of robust policemen quickly grabbed the boy's arms before he could raise them in response. There would be hell to pay for every rank up to the director general of police if Hamid managed to swing back at his assailant. At seventeen, he was a burly, muscular fellow and could have flattened the older man. The shoe rained on and the abusive yelling became more frenzied. Spotting a chance for promotions, the policemen too lunged in, kicking, abusing, pummelling, until the boy was a bleeding, writhing mess.

Still breathing heavily but satisfied now, the squat man left. Four decades before, his father had been prominent at the Sopore session but the rights and freedoms touted there had long been trampled into shackles in the scramble for the loaves of office. The man was one of the most powerful leaders of the National Conference now and he treated boys like Hamid like vermin.

Born in a despised caste, Hamid had never known a brave, new Kashmir. He was enrolled in class 8 but spent his days selling used clothes on the pavement. He had grown up in Batmaloo, not far from Guga. Although his father had often toiled to promote this squat man's politics, the Muslim United Front's fervour had sparked Hamid's mind. The Jamaat's district president, who had roared slogans of war from the top of a bus a few months earlier, was its candidate for the area around Lal Chowk and Hamid had campaigned tirelessly for him. So had the Islamic Students' League boys that Guga's loyal band had left behind.

It had been a euphoric campaign and, as it reached a crescendo, tumultuous throngs had cheered it on. On the morning of polling, Farooq had panicked after touring a few booths in the city. Clambering into the state helicopter, he jumped out at the police control room

on the other side of Batmaloo and yelled furiously at some startled officers on the lawn—ordering them to take some vans of central forces and beat up troublemakers. Later, a senior police officer and an equally senior bureaucrat landed at the offices of several returning officers. They had brought orders from the prime minister, they announced, offering no evidence. Muslim United Front activists were bundled out of counting centres, many of them straight to lock-up, and the ruling front's candidates declared elected, regardless of the ballots. About a dozen of the forty-two valley constituencies were thus rigged, wholesale. Unless Farooq was determined to get beyond having to depend on Congress support in the new assembly, there had been no reason to panic. Some of the senior leaders of the Muslim United Front were among the many who estimated fifteen years later that the group would have won no more than fifteen to twenty seats in the seventy-six-member assembly had the elections been fair

Hamid had been at the convent school polling booth. Incensed at the way polling was being conducted, he and several other boys had set fire to a police jeep and raised such a furore that senior police officers had swooped in with armed troops. Hamid was among those caught. Doughty Sopore was not so easily subdued. Thousands ringed the counting centre and, daring paramilitary forces to fire, physically prevented the returning officer from reversing their votes. So Geelani won that seat. But only three other Muslim United Front candidates were declared elected, Shabir's eager brother among them.

It was a drearily cold March and the mood was icy in the room at the Anantnag house where Muslim United Front leaders met to decide strategy after the results had been declared. Each candidate had undertaken to resign if the Front wanted, but nobody had signed away his right to the perks of becoming a member. Desperate arguments that the elected four must boycott the house were made in vain. Abdul Razzak Bichru was the only one among the four willing. But he added that if they decided to go, he would not resign if they later asked him to. Militants assassinated him in 1990. Geelani went straight to Jammu from that meeting to take his place in the assembly. He had taken his bag, packed, to that meeting.

Torn by self-centred opportunism, the Muslim United Front split by the middle of 1988. Feeling betrayed as it already was by Farooq's

alliance with the Congress—the way it had been with his father's deal a decade earlier—Kashmir was left in a vacuum of political leadership.

It was a dangerous time for Kashmir to face a vacuum of leadership. Four decades after its awful serfdom had ended, it was just gathering the gumption to express the resentments it had repressed for centuries. Fuelled by education, mass media, Islamic resurgence and the milieu of relatively fearless dignity they had been born into, the aspirations of Aftab's generation were now at boiling point.

Those who had made money through trade, corruption or illicit poppy culture had begun to spend, making extravagance fashionable. Colonies of mansions with parquet floors, *khatambandi* ceilings and piped heating had sprung up in the fields around Srinagar—Rawalpora, Buchpora, Bemina, Zakura and Hyderpora. And families, eager to establish status, had begum to spend so much on wedding feasts in the last three years of the 1980s that it became common to order mutton by the quintal rather than the kilo. In the societal pell-mell that had followed land reforms, everyone was eager to establish personal status and superior lineage more urgently than ever before. Many adopted the Syed title, many more the Dar surname, which denoted Pandit descent.

It had all been too sudden: the switch from virtual slavery to a socio-economic revolution, then abruptly to Bakshi's benevolent patronage and then limbo. Kashmiris were aware of opportunities but unsure how to order society, how to take control of their collective destiny, whether as individuals or communities—and, if so, which communities. Agrarian societies tend to be patriarchal, for the produce of the land is not sufficient to support individual aspirations. Ergo, humanist societies bubbling with aspirations tend to break out of agricultural economic structures. But although Abdullah had destroyed the feudal orders of Pandit, Syed and other landlords, he had not built alternative channels for the fulfilment of aspirations—neither industry nor trade nor migration.

Unless aspirations are repressed during a disciplined shift to industry under totalitarian administration, as in Soviet Russia or China,

a sudden end to a feudal order brings chaos, as it did to eighteenth-century France. The autocratic methods of Abdullah and Bakshi had controlled Kashmir for a while but neither had used that time to restructure the economy. The resultant social chaos, that had begun to churn since the 1960s, came to a head two decades on.

Kashmir's culture did not inspire thrift, teamwork, value addition or investment for the long term, but it did fuel aspirations, with the urgent passion of an inferiority complex. Not only were aspirations frustrated, Kashmir had no vent, as formal political opposition had been repeatedly throttled. It was only natural then for those frustrations to latch onto the overarching questions that hung heavy over the legitimacy of the government. Aftab was not the only Kashmiri who decided during the turbulent 1980s that secession would bring fulfilment—and that religion was a panacea for socio-economic ills.

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Proxy War

There was a spark in the boy's eyes, Waza thought. So he seized what opportunities he could to sound the mettle behind the glint, speaking to him in the yard surrounded by thick stone or at meals if he could squat close enough. His hunch had been right. The boy was steel. His name was Ishfaq, and he was there for pelting stones at Farooq Abdullah.

So sudden and sharp had that attack been at the Idgah, just a few days after the elections, that the chief minister had fled, barefoot. The boy was nabbed, though, and thus it was jail that brought the swaggering hero of the Islamic Students' League to the boy Maqbool Butt had met in a forest. For years, young Waza had thrown himself into the zeal for independence which that chance encounter had ignited. He had kept in touch with Butt's brother, Ghulam Nabi, and when a man had turned up at the Butt home a couple of years after the revolutionary had been caught, Waza was more excited than the Butt family. He had brought a pile of paper, including pamphlets and posters, from the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) across the Line of Control—its leaders having agreed to drop 'National' from the title some years before. The Butt family was scared and it was left to Ghulam Nabi, a decade younger than Maqbool, to deal with the publicity material. It had been lying in a corner for a few days by the time Waza turned up for his next visit.

Brimming with excitement, the fourteen-year-old had breathlessly pulled Maqbool's brother out and together they had walked to the homes of friends they could trust in nearby villages. It was from Maqbool sahib's friends, Waza would whisper. Then, surreptitiously at night, they would creep out to paste posters where they dared. The messenger kept bringing more and the boys' treks took them further—

until, in July 1982, the police caught a boy with the posters and traced them back to Waza. At eighteen, he and Maqbool's brother were in police lock-up for the first time.

That did not stop them and the duo was rounded up again two years later. Becoming bolder still, they eagerly accepted a defunct bomb the next year from a retired army officer in a village not far away. That was discovered too and this time the duo was tortured with metal under their nails. But that only steeled Waza's resolve. By then, the winds from Iran, the dark magic of *Omar Mukhtar* and the shenanigans of rival claimants to power had made the entire valley volatile. Back home at the end of 1986, the duo sent a message across the mountains: they wanted to lead an armed struggle.

Word came back quickly: Pakistan would back it.

The boys were cautious, remembering that Maqbool had been arrested and tortured when he had gone across. They sent another message: would Pakistan back their struggle for an independent Kashmir? By the time a reply arrived—in the affirmative—the police had picked up Waza again. So, he wondered, when fate brought the extraordinary Ishfaq to him in the spring of 1987, whether he should tell him what he hoped to start. He stayed awake late in his jail cell on several nights measuring the potential of the boy against fear that the plan might get out. Finally, he decided: the boy seemed all right but the risk was too great. They spoke often though in general terms of prising their valley out of India. Waza spoke of revolution and India's revolutionary freedom fighters—Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, Sukhdev, Lala Lajpat Rai. Every time, Ishfaq's eyes glinted.

When Waza was released at the beginning of winter, Ishfaq hugged him tight. Kissing him on both cheeks, he said they would meet again. Seeing his chance, Waza scribbled his address and told the boy to come and see him when he was released. Maqbool's brother was waiting impatiently. There had been three or four messages asking when they were coming for training.

For the first time since its failed bid in 1965, Pakistan was, in 1987, not only willing but eager to stoke the fires of rebellion in Kashmir. The country's ruler, General Zia-ul Haq, was the shrewdest strategist to have held its reins and, for Pakistan's army more than any other sort of government, Kashmir had remained the golden prize since that wild card had flopped in 1947. Zia had waited at first, shrewdly seeing

that he could ride the tide of time. For two events that would change the world dovetailed with his coup: Iran's revolution and Soviet Russia's invasion of Afghanistan. He used the latter to foment Islamist fervour at home and turn his nation into the United States' instrument to win the Cold War. The Jamaat was his staff, providing schools for the first and muscle—through Gulbuddin Hikmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami—for the second.

While at home Zia renovated the pork-relishing Jinnah's creation into the fountainhead of violent jihad, abroad he pushed his farsighted predecessor's realignment of Pakistan as China's ally and instrument. By the mid-1980s, he had acquired an apocalyptic guarantor that India would not strike back for Pakistan's abetment to a freedom struggle. General Akhtar Malik, the head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in the mid-1980s, had told Azam Inquilabi that Pakistan began work on the Kashmir insurgency in 1984—no doubt as soon as it got its atomic bomb.

M.K. Rasgotra, who was at the time India's foreign secretary, had spent more than two years (from 1982 to 1984) negotiating a comprehensive agreement on Kashmir with his Pakistani counterpart, Niaz Naik—who even agreed that no foreign bases would be allowed on either country's soil, even though US troops were already on a base outside Peshawar. Those remarkably accommodative negotiations were evidently meant to buy time while Pakistan put together its bomb: Zia nixed the pact just when every detail had been sorted out.

By the time Gorbachev's desperation to wriggle out of the bleeding mess in Afghanistan had become plain in 1986, Zia was ready for Kashmir. No doubt he figured he could now get a grateful West to back Pakistan once more at the United Nations. To prepare the ground, now that India would hesitate to retaliate with war, an indigenous freedom struggle would be perfect. Through the ISI, which gained such power under Zia that it would later remain a government within a government, he made a deal with the JKLF. The group undertook to wage guerrilla war with Pakistani arms and training.

The acquittal of JKLF's founder, Amanullah Khan, on charges under the UK's Explosives Act came in handy, for Britain deported him to Pakistan on 15 December 1986 despite India's protests. Khan promptly wrested the reins from Hashim Qureshi, whose conditions for leading the insurgency had convinced some Pakistani officers that

he was pro-India. The messages to Waza and Butt had begun to flow over the next year and, soon after Waza's release, the ecstatic boys surged across the soft snow of early December 1987 to spend a whirligig week dominated by hours of discussion. They returned in mid-December, ready to dispatch trainees for their war of independence.

All they needed now was to find those warriors.

They lay swaddled in quilts, whispering by freezing candlelight on several nights in a tiny room of Butt's house to figure out whom to send. They had to put their best foot forward but most of the rural boys who had helped them with posters and the occasional firecracker might not be up to it. On those freezing nights, one thing at least became clear: The roof on Butt's house would not last the winter. Since one of the very few city boys who had been drawn into their campaigns happened to be a tin salesman, they thought they might sound him out while purchasing corrugated roofing.

The tin salesman was a handsome young man called Hilal Beg. At first his visitors spoke only of tin but, after they had bought it, Hilal insisted that they come home with him. In a neat little room up solid wooden stairs spiralling up within a matchbox building a stone's throw from the mirwaiz's old mansion, he served them a dinner so delicious it could only have been cooked in that corner of the city adjacent to Wazapora—the enclave of chefs since the days of guilds.

As they relaxed after dinner, conversation turned naturally to their desultory campaigns. Waza tensed, sensing that this was a decisive moment. Finally, he sat up and rapidly recounted how much further things had moved. The three men talked into the early hours, the light of a candle reflecting off their shining cheeks. Soon, Hilal was more eager than his visitors. He said he was ready to go alone, tomorrow if they wanted, and he knew at least one other boy who would want to go with him.

The next day, Waza and Ghulam Nabi waited as Hilal went in search of the boy he had promised. He returned with Hamid, now out of jail too but still stinging from the abuse of that squat politician in a police station on election day. Defying the *Chille Kalan* (Great Cold), Hilal, Hamid and four others trooped off across the mountains through the frost of February 1988. They returned in a fortnight with Kalashnikovs, pistols, RDX plastic explosive, fuses and detonators.

The second group waited until the snow began to melt in early April and a third went in May. By summer, their little war machine was rolling.

Waza took on the role of guerrilla coordinator, tying a scarf across his face or even speaking from behind a curtain to new recruits. He embraced Ishfaq warmly though when he turned up one day, clutching the scrap on which Waza had scribbled his address. With him was his thin, lanky acolyte, Yasin, both eager to fight. Their host was cautious, though. Asking them to stay the night, he probed their minds in rambling conversations. They were Pakistanis, he told them finally, wrinkling his nose.

Poor Waza had no idea. Most trainees in the second batch were not only dedicated to Pakistan, some were pan-Islamic. Mohammed Maqbool Ilahi, Mohammed Ashraf Dar and Khalid Mohammed Abdullah were among them, and each was to become a lethal enemy of the JKLF, the last taking the alias Abdullah Bangroo. By the time those Islamists were decimating the freedom movement, Ishfaq and Yasin would be icons of the JKLF—while Waza would have been forgotten.

Waza sent the two boys back that day but they returned a few days later to cajole. With them was an older fellow and, though he was no debater, he grinned and nodded each time one of the smarter boys made a point. Javed Mir was his name. He had never done well in school and had waded into the anti-India tide instead. After campaigning for Lone's nascent People's Conference around 1980, he had become a municipal plumber but kept landing in jail, for he was a leader of the stone pelting mob. He lost his job in 1986 when Professor was sacked.

When Waza finally relented, Ishfaq marched off in June, leading his two buddies and two others. Sickly Yasin was ready to collapse on the return trek but his hero carried him on his back for an entire day, tramping grittily on blisters. They had to drop their arms in the forest that day, for Javed and the other two could not carry the entire pile while Ishfaq carried Yasin. When they got back, Ishfaq stomped out again with Waza after tucking Yasin into bed. Ignoring the bursting blisters, he stole a car from the bus stand and went back into the forest to retrieve the weapons.

No wonder his comrades worshipped him.

Once he and Yasin had revived a little, they launched into battle—with Waza. Both argued hotly about the terms they had been forced to sign in blood and swear on the Quran before training. They would fight Pakistan if they had to for Jammu and Kashmir's independence, the JKLF membership bond had said. The boys were livid. The premise of the Islamic Students' League and all their other activism was Kashmir shall be Pakistan. Both yelled that Waza had betrayed them. Waza argued as well as he could, then handed them some JKLF literature, including things that Maqbool Butt had written. He had no time to indoctrinate every bunch of boys, he decided, and he had to take stock now of the big picture.

He crossed the mountains again later in June, along with Maqbool's brother and a couple of others, to talk to the JKLF leaders there. While they were discussing progress one day at the home of Raja Muzaffar, a leading light of the JKLF, an ISI man called Farid brought a group of Kashmiris to the door. They belonged to the People's League and wanted to be trained. As soon as he heard that they were from the pro-Pakistan group, Waza turned up his nose and said he would not meet them. So some of the JKLF leaders based in Muzaffarabad met them instead.

They had to get JKLF approval to be trained, for Zia's instructions to the ISI were pointed: insurgency in Kashmir was to be channelled only through the pro-freedom JKLF. But the dogmatic training of the Jamaat and Ahle-hadis had over the decades hardened the resolve of a section, albeit a small section, of Kashmir. The People's League fellows were adamant. They would rather die than sign the JKLF code, they said. Pakistan was their motherland. And they insisted they must write 'Muslim', not 'Kashmiri', in the column for *quom*, community.

That argument was critical. Assertion of religious identity had bubbled up from the heat that social snubs had generated way back in 1931. As then, and in 1967, the economic frustrations of educated men like Aftab underlay the eruptions around that identity fault line. Although Kashmir's deep-rooted sense of ethnic identity—nay, superiority—had reasserted itself in the 1930s, the current gusts of resurgent Islamic consciousness blowing from Iran and Afghanistan were heady. They had already swept up the passions of men like Guga and Aftab and the confusion about identity—about whether the fight was ultimately for religion or ethnicity—would remain until Kashmir's

ancient pride would recover poise in the 1990s. Except for diehard exceptions such as Guga, most Kashmiris would decide by the middle of that decade that their movement was basically ethnic.

When it comes to the crunch, genes are the strongest social link. The primal motivation of any society is to ensure that at least some of the community's genes survive, if not each individual's. Some societies use religion to underpin exclusivity, conflating religion with ethnicity. Indeed, so hidebound is the exclusivity of Zoroastrianism and Judaism (an insecurity much heightened in both cases by the loss of territory) that it has at times threatened more than protected the gene pool. Nature after all loves entropy. Religions like Buddhism and Christianity can blunt genetic antagonism when they are practised in the spirit their founders sought to inculcate—for each taught universal oneness, or at least fraternity. However, some societies have bent these religions to buttress ethnic nationalism, manufacturing such potent glues as Shinto Buddhism, Tibet's feudal Lamaism, the German Evangelical Church and the Church of England. Of course, as the violence in Northern Ireland demonstrates, their success depends on a singular dominant ethnic as well as religious identity across a nation. Often, this must be achieved through genocide or forced migration, and so is pointless in a postmodern, global village.

Muslim theologians, steeped in the Arab legacy of Islam's foundation, have found it difficult to deploy Islam to bolster ethnic nationalism outside Arabia. No wonder Pakistan's founding template was stretching malleably into a global one around this period. There is a dichotomy between Islamic canon and history: its origin links it inextricably with Arab nationalism but its tenets are explicitly universal. Although the Shia schisms centred on the primacy of one genetic strain, and successive Caliphates were rooted in the struggles of Iraqis, Egyptians and Turks for ethnic supremacy, the doctrine of the *ummah* as a single egalitarian community undermines the nationalist dimension of any Islamic movement.

The best way then to use Islam to bolster a do-or-die spirit is to apply a pan-Islamist doctrine—for which of course a media-networked global village is most conducive. In the late 1980s, pan-Islamism gained much salience. Indeed, some of those who argued fervently that day in Muzaffarabad implicitly undermined Pakistan's territorial nationhood.

Kashmir was for the most part so ethnically hypersensitive that

it would not brook the submergence of its identity in a larger inclusive one, be it pan-Indian or pan-Islamic. But it was prone to accommodating contradictions. So fervently did the People's League men argue that the JKLF leaders agreed to let them be trained without signing the JKLF code, as long as they were not given arms.

This compromise—a contrast with the LTTE's murderous intolerance of other militant Tamil groups in Sri Lanka—turned out to be a big mistake for the JKLF. Three of those who argued that day in Muzaffarabad—Sheikh Abdul Aziz, Jamal Afghani and Nazir Ahmed Shah—would over the next several years become chief commanders of the People's League's militant arm, when the JKLF would be crippled, collapsing amid battles with other militant groups. (Kashmir's ancient ways would catch up with the outfit affiliated to the People's League too and it would witness more ego-inspired splits than any other group in Kashmir.)

But all that was still a long way away, and Waza would soon learn that Pakistan's current boss was clear, despite his Islamist convictions, that nationalism was far more palatable to the global powers of the day than Islamic aspirations. One evening, Colonel Asad, the ISI officer in charge of training, took Butt and Waza aside and asked them to meet him the next day without telling the local JKLF leaders. The next morning, he drove them to the rocky slopes near the Afghan border, showing them how the trainees were taken in closed Toyota vans from Muzaffarabad to a safe house in Rawalpindi that belonged to Maulana Bari of the Jamaat and thence to Kachgiri near Peshawar for training—their camp not far from those at which Sikh insurgents were being trained.

A few days later, the officer took them separately again, telling Amanullah he was taking them to Islamabad's King Faisal mosque. It was only when they swung through a pair of huge gates that the young men realized they were entering the president's house. Waza would say years later that General Zia had told them that the world must only hear slogans of freedom from Kashmir, not pro-Pakistan ones—even if they wanted to shout those. Only then could Pakistan help them. The president did not bring it up but, on the way back, the colonel asked them when they intended to begin operations. He asked often after that. They promised action soon.

On 31 July 1988, three blasts shook Srinagar, the biggest at the Amar Singh Club.

Ishfaq was asleep that night in a second floor room of his house with Yasin and Javed—for Waza had given the job to another lot. But the police had heard only of the dynamos of the Islamic Students' League, and a superintendent of police led a posse straight to Ishfaq's house the next morning. Swaggering in the corridor at the entrance, the officer tapped his baton and demanded who Ishfaq was.

His comrades had left by then and Ishfaq, who was listening from an adjacent room, thrust a baseball cap on his head, pulled his shirt out of his belt and, tucking a couple of books under his arm, emerged. He passed the officers with a quiet 'Side please' and, as they watched suspiciously, walked down the corridor, passing the front door without even glancing at it. When he turned into the kitchen, the officers turned back to questioning his family—while he leapt from a first floor window. Despite a sprained ankle, he landed like a cat in the yard of the little temple across the alley. Guessing that the area was cordoned, he slipped into an empty bier behind a nearby mosque and lay still under a shroud.

That superintendent had rushed to Ishfaq's house without the only Criminal Investigation Department (CID) inspector who recognized the boy. Kashmir's police was too used to grabbing accolades where they could to get it right. For years, they had slammed Shabir into jail each time a little bomb had exploded—in the coffee house toilet, at the university library, at a temple. Each time, those who had planted the bombs escaped unscathed while Shabir's profile mushroomed. This police bungling catapulted Ishfaq into the forefront of militancy. When he slipped back home that night, he told his father over dinner that it was his last meal there. A couple of days later, his trio fled to the north and Waza and Butt sent them back across.

Azam Inquilabi went too. Since the boys had told him a few days earlier of their training, he had bustled up to the Butt home after those blasts, eager to be part of the action—even if it meant collapsing on those ridges again. No wonder his nickname was 'Indi-Pindi'.

Less than a week later, Waza bounded across that mountain after them, striding through the night. He had heard the news on the radio:

a plane had crashed, killing President Zia-ul Haq, ISI director general Akhtar Malik and the US ambassador to Pakistan.

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'*Mard-e-momin, mard-e-haq. Zia-ul Haq, Zia-ul Haq* (Man of Islam, man of truth. Zia-ul Haq, Zia-ul Haq).' It was the morning after Zia-ul Haq's death and the yell ripped from Aftab's throat as his face burned red on the university grounds. He had worked himself into a passion through his little eulogy and the few score students who had stopped to listen responded as lustily.

Kashmir had swung from hating Zia when he hanged Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to idolizing him as an Islamic icon. (Such were its mood swings that most Kashmiris even turned away from Islamic Iran when Sunni Saddam Hussein was battling it.) Now that Zia had died so awfully, Kashmir's remorse burst forth. Every face had been mournful when Aftab emerged from class to hear the dramatic news. Rushing from the Law Faculty, he stopped at the tense knots of students on the lawns outside the Allama Iqbal Library—Kashmir University's monstrously ugly tribute to one that Kashmir cherished as its own.

Aftab needed the catharsis of his passionate speech on its lawns. The aching emptiness in him had only been accentuated by that morning's news. His ego had sunk a tiny bit each time he had heard of the heroic deeds of his one-time comrades led by Ishfaq, first in the election campaign and now as guerrillas. Guga had revived a defunct Muslim Students' Federation for those who had followed him out of the Islamic Students' League but the group did little. All Aftab had achieved since the split was to defy his father's insistence that he enrol for a postgraduate science degree. Abbu had a 'contact' who could get him a job in the Department of Mining. Aftab had asked Shabir's advice on one of those visits to the courts and Shabir had said a law degree would best equip him to fight for freedom. So Aftab had enrolled for law.

Zia's death had finally given him an opportunity like those college demonstrations. But plain clothes policemen, who had always been part of Kashmir's life, were now ubiquitous. As Aftab wiped his brow, his face still red from the excited eulogy, one of them came up

to brusquely say he had crossed the line and would have to face the consequences. Aftab tossed his head nonchalantly and went home.

Kashmir downed shutters for Zia and kept them down the next day. Aftab roamed the streets near his home, picking up a stone to throw at cars defying the bandh. The head of the police intelligence unit saw him and phoned his father, well known because of the school. Aftab would be arrested for this, he warned. Abbu yelled when he got home but Aftab was thus forewarned. Nimbly, he scampered over the wall into the next tiny yard as soon as he heard diesel in the street. Creeping up the rotting wooden stairs in that house, he crouched at the corner of a window to watch his family being humiliated. Determined not to let a police record mar his career as a lawyer, he watched them take Abbu away. After a couple of hours, he donned a burqa and strode out. Through the lattice of the veil, he could see people walking hurriedly away. He tried to walk more sedately but that did not help. His fear was infectious.

Suddenly feeling very insecure, he took a bus to Pahalgam in the deep south. He stayed put there for two months at a hotel owned by a friend. He would go home late after that, for Abbu's anger had not abated. He had been released the day after he had been detained, for the superintendent of police had been a student. But the humiliation of a night behind bars was too much to stomach. He had never cared for politics and was proud of the stature his school job had given him. So he yelled incessantly at his wife, wagging a finger as he spoke of all that he had done for the boy. Amma retreated further into silence, eyes like saucers. Padding heavily to the back veranda every now and again, she would draw in her breath and mutter a prayer if she saw a man in white in the lane. In her head, plain clothes policemen wore white shirts and white pants.

The neighbours disliked having the police snooping around and some complained obliquely to Abbu. Among themselves, they called Aftab a hoodlum. They had always been Pakistani, glowered some, alluding to Amma's accent. Amma hailed from beyond the Pir Panjal and though her grandmother Zoona Ded had been a leading light of Abdullah's early movement, Amma remained an outsider even after she learnt Kashmiri. Her accent was too Punjabi. Abbu sometimes felt he was being punished. He could not understand it. He had shown

respect to every form of God, and had always disdained the boy's activism. Even on the day Aftab had been elected president of his college union and had come home looking as radiant as if he had won the lottery, Abbu had only grunted.

For Aftab of course, the union became a cover as he thought of ways to promote the Islamic consolidation Guga's heart was set on. Since the union had Hindu and Sikh members and the treasurer was a Pandit girl, Aftab was always careful to project pleasant camaraderie. But behind his smiles lurked dark memories of his mother's relatives killed in Jammu in 1947 and his failed medical admission exams. Guga's little band was determined in the months after they left the Islamic Students' League that they had not made a mistake, that uncompromising dedication to Islam would succeed. Yet, Aftab craved the heroic persona. 'Aftab Mujahid' was how he signed the press statements he covertly delivered to newspapers every few weeks—about the appalling mores of young people, or the evils of gambling. He used the letterhead of that defunct group they had revived, the Muslim Students' Federation, but they were buoyed by nothing but religious fervour. They had little money and less support. One day Aftab sat with Guga and another comrade by the dreary light of a candle to plan a protest on India's Republic Day but they found they had no money even for black cloth to make flags or banners. Taking a deep breath, Aftab took off the Swiss watch that a student whose family owned a houseboat had presented to his father. They would sell it, he announced. Guga's eyes brimmed with tears as he shook his head. So did Aftab's. Both felt good.

On 13 August, the night before Pakistan's Independence Day, they scurried through alleys, putting up the Pakistani flag wherever they could—though they knew the police would tear them down at first light. They burst crackers the next day—with money Shabir had sent even from jail. The day after that was India's Independence Day and the bunch of boys sat glued to a little black and white television to see how many people went to the stadium for the ceremonies, praying anxiously for empty stands.

They repeated that the next year too, 1988, although Ishfaq's dynamic band had by then far outstripped such humdrum protests. It was two days after that that Aftab was finally able to make his presence

felt, the day Zia's plane crashed. When he returned to the university after two months underground, he was noticed. A couple of times a week, he took to wearing a white kurta and pajama with a *gamchha* over his shoulder, in the style of student-politicians in places like Assam and Bihar. And he would hector other students whenever he got a chance, more fierily than when he was at college. At one little demonstration, he said there was no reason Kashmir's students could not lead their people. A student leader had after all become chief minister of Assam. He felt the thrill of success when the vice chancellor sent a notice asking him to explain that speech.

The head of the law department warned him he could be expelled, adding contemptuously that his head was screwed on the wrong way. Ironically, that professor, who was destined to be part of the supreme council that Ishfaq would set up to advise the JKLF, would fall victim to a rival group's bullets. In fact, empathy must already have lurked in his heart. For, a few months after telling Aftab rudely off, he pleaded with the vice chancellor—who too would one day fall to militant bullets—to give Aftab a last chance before expelling him. The vice chancellor had angrily summoned the professor back from a visit to Delhi after Aftab had led another demonstration.

Aftab had in fact been pulled much further than university politics by then. A few weeks earlier, a friend from the Islamic Students' League had told him a preacher at the Shahid Ganj mosque wanted to talk to him. Aftab had been ushered up to a tiny room above the mosque, with a kitchen attached. When the preacher spoke, it was with the gentle ring of piety. A passionate Ahle-hadis ideologue, his swaying eloquence had for five years packed the mosque below every Friday. His name was Hilal Ahmed Mir but he had now taken the name Nasir-ul Islam. With him was Mohammed Ramzan Sofi—who would take the nom de guerre General Abdullah. He was Nasir's shadow.

Nasir had grown up in a village in the north before moving to the city, focussed on battling for the greater glory of Islam. Half a dozen young men often sat with him, sharing these uplifting ideas and, in mid-1986, they had begun to call themselves Ansar-ul Islam. They were not interested in political power, only jihad. Some People's League men joined, sick of the sniping between Shabir, now general secretary, and the acerbic president the league had imported from the Jamaat.

Among them was Ghulam Rasool Shah who, taking the name Imran Rahi, had gone with Nasir to train when naïve Waza dispatched them in his sixth batch, in August 1988.

A couple of months after that, Nasir had got his loyal band together at a rest house at Tangmarg. A relic of the Raj, the picturesque cottage could be rented for a nominal fee. Several Jamaat men were at that meeting, which discussed how best they could use the JKLF training to start a separate battle—for Pakistan and Islam. That decision having been taken, Nasir was in the winter of 1988–89 looking for recruits. Smart city boys would be perfect. Which is why, over a cup of tea, he proposed that Aftab and his friends get involved. Nasir said quite frankly that he did not know who was conducting the training operation, since the man always masked his face. But Nasir's orders would have to be strictly obeyed if Aftab accepted.

Sitting wide-eyed before him, Aftab felt he had been sucked into a B-grade movie. He might have craved a heroic image but all he had ever done was chuck stones and shout slogans. This talk of guns and insurrection frightened him. He flushed and said he would have to consult his friends. Aftab had been invited because he was designated president of their defunct outfit but Guga was supreme. So he went straight to Guga to tell him breathlessly of the meeting. When they went back together the next week, Nasir spoke in greater detail. The duo agreed to talk it over before making a commitment.

Nasir was in a hurry, though. Suddenly one day, he and his friend arrived at Aftab's door. Amma's eyes widened at the sight of his untrimmed beard, round white cap, short pajamas and piercing eyes. '*Ab hamari khair nahin*,' she muttered softly, fearing her son was in too deep. Giving her a sharp look, Aftab grabbed the tray of tea and took it to his room upstairs—by this time, he had moved from his tiny downstairs room to the biggest room in the house. There, he found Nasir kissing Shabir's photograph. After tea and biscuits, he handed Aftab 200 rupees and asked him, with a smile, to buy some kerosene. Then he explained which temple he wanted burnt. Aftab masked the tumult in his mind as he accepted the money and nodded. He never did buy the kerosene.

A few days later, the duo came to the university while Aftab was sitting with some boys and girls in the canteen outside the Urdu department. The visitors looked utterly incongruous among so many

jeans and T-shirts. Embarrassed, Aftab took them aside and said they should have asked him to come to the mosque. He was always conscious of his meticulously cultivated image, and uneasy about losing his law degree. They had only come to check if he needed help to burn the temple, said Nasir pleasantly. Aftab quickly said no, he would manage fine. Then he hurriedly fixed to meet them again and kept away from all their contacts for a few weeks. He had got the impression that Guga was not very interested in their plan, so that was all right. Indeed, Guga preferred to lead an outfit rather than be a cog in someone else's wheel.

Aftab was sure Pakistan was behind the duo but, though he was committed to Kashmir's merger with Pakistan, he had taken a dislike to them. Their rhetoric was of the sort that had inspired him for years but something about them was too ruthlessly real. They called another meeting, in a deserted guest house, and discussed for more than two hours by candlelight what they could do and how. Aftab listened but he was very cold. He took a deep breath when he got to the open air outside.

He never met them again.

{14}

To Arms

Ishfaq, Yasin, Javed and Hamid huddled under rough blankets in January's numbing cold inside huge sewerage pipes that lay endlessly beside the Idgah, waiting to be installed underground. One of them brought up the sobering point again: did Kashmir trust them yet? They had swept through the city with guns blazing at five places, including Lal Chowk, on 27 October 1988, the anniversary of Indian troops' arrival in Kashmir. Since Kashmiris decided cynically that it was an Indian intelligence game, Ishfaq had decided they must not take shelter in homes.

They became brothers on those lonely nights lying on the icy concrete of those pipes. Yasin had already been more than a brother to Ishfaq and, since he had latched on to them during their last visit to Muzaffarabad, Hamid was as devoted. So they called themselves the HAJI group now. With Yasin's real name, it was the acronym for Hamid, Aslam, Javed, Ishfaq.

Javed was a dynamo on most afternoons. Stopping passing vehicles to draw petrol, he would pour it into a bottle with limestone and gravel and stuff a rag into the mouth. They hurled these cocktails at passing government vehicles. They pelted stones too, but had only rarely used firearms yet. Ishfaq was adamant: no passer-by could be allowed to die.

In the following spring, he decided to test their credibility again. Emerging from prayers one Friday afternoon, they led an animated crowd to the edge of the inner city and, whipping out automatic rifles amid lusty slogans, fired bursts at the yellow walls of a police station around the corner from the shrine of the Round Room. While the startled policemen crouched for cover, the crowd hoisted the boys triumphantly on shoulders and marched to the next police station. There, below the hill with the fort, they let fly another burst. Over

the next day or two, Ishfaq dispatched his most loyal comrades across the city—to listen. He was finally satisfied with their reports. Kashmir's response was wonderment, but this time at gumption.

So the following month, he took the test further, calling for a three-day general strike to press India to 'Quit Kashmir'. It was the month of Ramzan and the government had just shifted from Jammu, the winter capital, with a dull sense of foreboding. Farooq Abdullah had even wanted to stay put in Srinagar that winter but, appalled by Jammu's riotous response, the Union government had insisted he go. In a combative mood now, Farooq ordered that the strike must not succeed, even if locks on shops that shut on those days had to be broken. His orders were carried out on the first day but shops just would not stay open. Nothing moved. Sitting almost alone in the sprawling secretariat building, Farooq could hear only dogs barking outside.

His government was no more than a bequest. He had not known how to meet the angst that Kashmir had wrapped ambivalently in the previous summer's strikes: over meat prices, power rates, nurses demands. His cavalcade of cars had sped through its sullen streets, sirens blaring. So unnerved were the police by demonstrators that their firing twice killed unarmed people protesting power price increases.

Kashmir felt Abdullah's failed legacy in its homes: three-day power cuts in freezing midwinter, fifteen minutes of calloused fingers for a telephone call, schools without roofs or windowpanes, gutters that gushed nauseatingly backward into homes. A generation after land reforms, Kashmir's aspirations had come of age. It wanted to enjoy life after centuries of distress, and it was frustrated. Plus, after his alliance with the Congress, no less a betrayal than his father's deal with Indira, Farooq meant India. So Kashmir had responded once more to a call that was once Abdullah's: Quit Kashmir. In 1946, Kashmir had been inspired by the agrarian Utopia its messiah had conjured. Now too, it looked for an end to a discredited, repressive order, but with no clear idea of ideology or economic structures, no leader or plans for sustainability. It had always planned immediate term. Kashmiris could see on the Western media how Eastern Europe was lapping up freedom, and theirs would be topped with the divine flavour of the decade: Islam.

Ishfaq's band soared like Icarus as Kashmir, swinging emotionally to an extreme, celebrated his boys like so many bridegrooms. At least

one home in Maharaj Ganj showered flowers and coins and sweets on their heads to the lilting of swaying women before they were seated to a magnificent *wazwan*. As ecstatic, the men who ran the JKLF across the mountains appointed Ishfaq chief commander of military operations.

✣

Apart from the administrative inadequacies that did not let him respond capably, Farooq Abdullah was hamstrung by a political deadlock between his party and the Congress, with which it had been forced into a shotgun marriage. Within a year of the 1987 elections, in fact, the alliance partners were so edgy with each other that Farooq could not even get an appointment with Rajiv Gandhi. And when, after waiting endlessly for the Congress' nominations for a cabinet expansion, he went ahead on his own, the Congress promptly split. Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, who had revived the Congress like a Phoenix after 1977, left in a huff. He had lost his own seat in the 1987 assembly—after, or so the grapevine claimed, Mrs Abdullah waved a bottle of rat poison at officials and said she would consume it if he won.

By early 1989, Jagmohan had become convinced that his competence was the need of the hour. His spring proposal for another spell of governor's rule had much support in Delhi but Rajiv was in two minds—for Arun Nehru, his cousin who had supported Jagmohan, had become a bitter enemy. So he turned to K.V. Krishna Rao, a retired general who was then tackling insurgency in an eastern state as governor. Rajiv's mother had trusted the general. Telling Krishna Rao what Jagmohan had recommended, Rajiv asked him to take Jagmohan's place. If he concurred with Jagmohan's assessment for governor's rule, Krishna Rao could take the reins.

Two days after the general arrived as governor in early July 1989—and a day before Bakr Id—the JKLF boys fired at a central reserve police van in the heart of the city. When the policemen fired back, nine died. The police claimed those who had been killed were the attackers. Others said they had merely been passers-by. Though only the ceremonial head of the administration, Krishna Rao decided to probe. Farooq, aware that the general could take the reins any time, did not object.

Krishna Rao would recount in vivid detail years later how the most senior police officers were ranged before him when he threw aside the official report and growled: 'I want the truth.' The truth was simple. The policemen who had been fired at were so panicked that their van had screeched over the road divider as they fled, firing wildly behind them. Finding this completely unacceptable, Krishna Rao told Farooq he had to deal firmly with the police. Obsequious, Farooq said he left everything to him. He must have begun to feel as if he was stuck in a quagmire. In fact, so depressed was he by October 1989 that he met nobody for a couple of weeks, claiming he was not well.

Yet the governor backed him unwaveringly. When Rajiv had called in August to say pressure to dismiss Farooq was growing, Krishna Rao said he could only doubly emphasize his advice: Rajiv would have no buffer between him and the people if he did that. People would blame the Union directly for custodial killings. In a few weeks, the prime minister had called again. Speaking at Hazratbal, Farooq had lambasted the Union for starving the state of funds, power and everything else it needed. Farooq was abusing him now, Rajiv complained peevishly. 'I told him to speak like that,' replied Krishna Rao, waving away the tirade as no more than a political posture. There was no problem, things were well under control, he had said.

Krishna Rao had very little idea quite how far out of control disenchanted Kashmir was that autumn of 1989 but he was right on this point: New Delhi's interference would only have aggravated it further. Farooq's postures were not India's problem, Kashmir's resentment was. India had forgotten over the quarter century after Nehru to respect the Kashmiri people. Dazed by Kashmir's feints, the wheels it spun within wheels, India had become scared of Kashmir—too scared to read its signals right. Sadiq had written to Nehru on 15 January 1964: 'One of the beliefs which has been commonly entertained in the past is that the influence of Pakistan on Kashmir's Muslims is fairly wide and firmly rooted. From this belief has stemmed a primordial fear of the people.'

He was right, but that was not all. India also feared the world, how the powers-that-were might turn capricious Kashmir, revelling through history in the role of victim, to their advantage. But even that fear was only subliminal. All India had was self-righteousness as it

earnestly waved a piece of paper at the world: Hari Singh's letter of accession. Legally India was correct but empires, not nations, are built with the parchment of treaties. And having given up on trying to understand Kashmir, India found itself stuck in a cycle of suspicion: Delhi expected Farooq to deliver while the people reviled him as a stooge of Delhi, and any stance he adopted to deflate that image became proof in Delhi that the rebellion was all his doing.

The result: nobody had facts. A meeting of police and intelligence brass argued in October 1989 over whether there were 600 trained guerrillas or 800. They finally compromised on 700. In fact, Ishfaq's active cadre numbered forty-five that autumn, with eight automatic weapons among them. The rest had pistols. In all, not even a hundred boys had been trained. The largest batch, that June, had had nine boys.

A year earlier, the police's ignorance had been comic. When in September 1988 Aijaz Dar, the oldest of the trained boys, had become impatient after a quarrel with his brother and stalked out to fire a burst from his AK-56 outside the residence of a police officer who tortured people there, Kashmir's senior officers had looked perplexedly at the gun beside his body. After an officer who sometimes read *Jane's Strategic Defence* weekly mentioned what it was called, the inspector general in charge of intelligence added a line at the end of his one-page report: one 'Calcincope' rifle also found at site.

If the police was comic, the army had no idea at all about what was going on. No intelligence reports were placed before him when Lieutenant General Mohammed Ahmed Zaki took command of the Srinagar-based 16 Corps in October 1989. Zaki was an unassuming man but his career was an example of fearless soldiering and absolute rectitude. He was destined to spend most of the next six years coping with Kashmir's insurgency but the first inkling he got of it was when a group of students from Maharashtra, 2000 kilometres away, turned up at the cantonment gate. Agog at what they had seen while bicycling around the valley that autumn, they pedalled up to the gate one windy November day, asking to meet the commander. Tenacity got their leader to the corps commander's office and, over a cup of tea, he told Zaki agitatedly that a lot of people had adjusted their watches to Pakistan time. 'In a few weeks, sir, you will need a visa to come here,' he said.

Things were indeed progressing towards an explosion that had the potential to be more decisive than the one in 1931. That summer, Mirwaiz Yousuf Shah had been pushed to centre stage, albeit briefly. This time, his successor was among those most threatened by what was afoot. His bold gamble to heal a wound that had festered for half a century, the Double Farooq Accord, had been terribly mistimed and Mirwaiz Farooq was teetering now on the tightrope he had tread for a quarter-century—for Pakistan disdained him as an Indian stooge and India abhorred his flock as Pakistani.

So he toyed desperately with a fresh coalition. Using Ayatollah Khomeini's death anniversary to test it, he invited Qazi Nisar from Anantnag along with Farooq's brother-in-law and the 'goat' who was MP for Srinagar to speak at the Jamia. But that function too became a nightmare. His aides scuttled up to whisper that there were gunmen in the audience. The mirwaiz's neat black beard contrasted sharply with his pallor as the blood drained from his handsome face. His jaw remained firmly set, his face a mask, but his cheek twitched intermittently, the only visible sign of the hurricane of terror within. Reaching for the brocade border of his mantle, he pulled it closer round him, staring fixedly ahead.

In the audience was Aftab, squatting beside the tank at the centre of the mosque, beside Guga and a bunch of their band. He reached into his phiran soon after the function began and, fishing for a sheet with the JKLF letterhead that Javed had given him, scribbled on it. Then, beckoning a boy, he told him to give the folded note to the mirwaiz. If the Indians spoke, it said, they would fire. Guga's group had no guns yet but the threat was enough. The mirwaiz did not even invite Qazi Nisar to speak.

Aftab and his comrades were in the mood for heroics, though. As the mirwaiz was closing the function, the boys surged forward in a roar of slogans and broke the platform. In the mêlée, someone phoned the police and, as the lonely mirwaiz silently watched the crowd run helter-skelter, the mournful moan of sirens punctuated the din. The boys ran into adjacent lanes and Aftab ducked up some stairs as a police jeep lurched into the lane. Surveying the mayhem from a third floor window, he smiled happily. They had finally made a mark. This would surely be in the newspapers. Lieutenant General Syed Amir he called himself in press releases now—emphasizing Syed—but their little band had remained unnoticed until today.

He was now a lawyer but his mind was never focussed on work—unless he was fretting about the lies lawyers routinely told, or corruption at the courts, or the heresy of calling a judge 'my lord'. Beyond these self-righteous ideas, he was not interested in work. He routinely left the chambers early, even though most clients came in the evenings, and enjoyed nothing better than swaggering through the bylanes with Javed, a borrowed pistol stuck snugly in his pocket. The two shared a hideout now. They suited each other: being with Javed gave Aftab the vicarious thrill of Ishfaq's band, and for Javed, sophisticated Aftab's companionship was far more restful than Ishfaq's staccato mastery.

Javed's reflected glory sufficed for a while but with every passing week Guga's band became more restless. Desperate, they decided to turn to their icon. Surely he would know the road to glorious battle. Shabir had been locked up just a few days before, caught in a truck on the highway to Jammu, trying to cross the border near Sialkot. Other fans joined them for the jail visit and half a dozen finally sat before Shabir, pleading with him to tell them what they should do. He just sat there, smiling beatifically. As they waited, his brow furrowed slightly over those eyes larger than Mona Lisa's. Then he turned to Aftab and said, gently admonishing, that they should not have taken this risk. They pressed him again, urgently, for guidance. There must be a gun in every house, he then said gravely. Every child must be ready to struggle. But he would say nothing beyond such vacuous generalities.

After a while, he called Aftab and one of the others—a tall, fair boy with long, light locks—aside. Shabir was particularly concerned about these two. Aftab was a cousin and Shabir was very fond of the other boy whose piercing grey-blue eyes and sharp features gave his gentle smile an aristocratic edge. A Kashmiri of Syed descent who had grown up on the Jammu side of the range, his fervour was as passionate as Shabir's. He would, a few weeks later, adopt the name Babar Badr, lion of the Prophet's battlefield. His eyes showing worry under a furrowed brow, Shabir softly told them both that they must go home immediately. It was too dangerous for them to have come to jail like this. Babar was after all the one who had made the arrangements for him to cross the border.

Disillusioned, Guga and his group decided they had to give up on their icon for leadership, and Guga now began to make his own

plans. He had decided in the spring of 1989 to call his band Hizbullah, the army of God. The name had been dear to Ayatollah Khomeini, he kept saying, and the Quran had first used the term. So after that futile meeting with Shabir, the group announced the name in August 1989. It set them as far apart from the JKLF as Guga's aspiration was from nationalism.

The announcement excited a host of incipient insurgents, for more than half of those whom Waza had arranged to train had kept aloof from the JKLF, intent on a pro-Pakistan or pan-Islamist ideology. Waza was in jail, having been identified under torture by one of his trainees, and the JKLF was straining to remain united under Ishfaq—whose dynamic leadership some of his comrades found overpowering. Indeed, Hilal was the first to contact Guga after Hizbullah was announced. Having led the first group of trainees, he had been dumbstruck when Ishfaq had been named JKLF chief commander.

As summer turned to autumn, Guga and Hilal set off together across the mountains to look for separate channels of training and arms. They found they were not the only ones in Muzaffarabad wanting backing for separate outfits. Maqbool Ilahi and Ashraf Dar, two of the Jamaat-e-Islami men who had been with Nasir at a Tangmarg rest house the previous autumn, were there too—and Babar Badr, now Shabir's battle commander.

Seven of them stayed together in a rented two-bedroom flat. Their greatest comfort there was the boy one of them had brought from the valley, for he cooked Kashmiri food. The pulaos and rotis and naans of Muzaffarabad were all right for an occasional change but none of them could eat it regularly. So they gathered every evening, waiting for the boy to dish out bloated rice with mutton.

The seven were not exactly friends, just less uncomfortable with each other than with the JKLF. In fact, Babar had contempt for one of the others, an illiterate, loutish chain-smoker called Mushtaq Zargar, who was there with his acolyte Shabir Zargar. Mushtaq used to burnish brass in the inner city until he led a dozen others to wage war after Maqbool Butt was hanged in 1984, under the banner Al Maqbool. He had crossed the mountains then too but no arms or training were to be had. When he heard that they were, he had found his way to Waza. Taking an instant dislike to the lout, Waza had turned him away twice but had finally sent him to train in the autumn of 1988.

Mushtaq and the others in that apartment had come a long way in the year since then and the autumn of 1989 was propitious for the pleas they had brought to Muzaffarabad. Pakistan's Kashmir strategy had been adrift since Zia and his ISI chief had been blown apart a year before. Benazir Bhutto had become prime minister a few months after she had won the elections—during which time she had hammered out a how-we-can-live-together deal with the army. That deal focussed on Afghanistan. She promised to keep her patrician nose out of which jihad group was to be helped to take power in the messy situation there and out of the nuclear programme, but one of the first things she did was shut down the JKLF training camp. However, while the police locked up Kashmiri boys—Javed, who had been in Muzaffarabad again in the winter of 1988–89, jumped from a jail window to escape—the ISI quietly kept handing out weapons. Benazir was forced before long to allow the camp to reopen, screaming 'jihad, jihad, jihad' to dampen the domestic furore, but the ISI's distance from her had been established.

Through the rest of 1989, it was really up to Colonel Asad, the ISI's point man for Kashmir, to interpret Zia's plans. An emotional Kashmiri himself, he was responsive to visitors from that flat in Muzaffarabad. So by the end of October, several important rivals to the JKLF had obtained ISI backing.

Babar got a separate training camp for his Muslim Janbaz Force. So did Zargar, who decided to call his outfit Al Umar. Maqbool Ilahi and Ashraf Dar too succeeded. That duo toyed at first with calling their outfit Harkat-ul Ansar or Al Badr, but suddenly one day a colleague called Ahsan Dar announced in Kashmir that their group would be called Hizb-ul Mujahideen. A schoolmaster who had been among the less significant men at Tangmarg, Dar had shot to fame after staff at the hospital to which he had been taken from jail allowed him to escape. After a round of annoyed muttering, the duo in Muzaffarabad fell in line. Their camp would fly the flag of Hizb. It was the new name of Ansar-ul Islam, which Nasir-ul Islam of the Ahle-hadis had founded at a Tangmarg guest house a year earlier.

Thus, three new outfits took shape, each dedicated to Kashmir's merger with Pakistan: the Muslim Janbaz Force was an offshoot of the People's League, Al Umar was based among the 'goats' of downtown, although it did not have the mirwaiz's blessing, and Hizb

for the moment included Islamist radicals from both the Ahle-hadis and the Jamaat-e-Islami. Hilal got lucky too. Persuading the JKLF founders in Muzaffarabad that a students' wing was the need of the hour, he offered to found it and was accepted. So, a fourth rival to the JKLF took shape, only this one too was dedicated to independence. Guga, the idealist, was the only one left out in the cold. The ISI colonel was uncertain about his pan-Islamist notions, founded neither on Kashmiri nationalism nor Pakistani.

Actually Guga's thinking was the clearest of the lot, being the narrowest. Determined to set at least one record straight, he marched into the JKLF office one morning and hurled his crumpled membership certificate at one of its more respected leaders, Dr Farooq Haider. Haunted by the blood with which he had signed commitment to Kashmiri nationalism, Guga had not been able to sleep the previous night.

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Back in Srinagar, Ishfaq too was not sleeping well. Since, by day, he was not his buoyant self, his three comrades too remained glum. They were short of guns and Hilal had given them only eight of the twenty Kalashnikovs he had brought back, keeping the rest for his students' wing. The HAJI four were not sure what that wing meant but it seemed suspiciously like a split.

One overcast day, the wind from the north-west was chilly—for it was early winter now—as the foursome walked desultorily near the northern edge of the inner city, beside the wall of the Islamia College. Hamid must have found the mood far too heavy. Not yet twenty, his mind still bustled with pranks. Seeing a police sub-inspector standing nonchalantly ahead, he turned to the others and suggested that they snatch his revolver. He did it himself and sprinted down a side street, triumphantly waving the pistol in one hand and two thread injection grenades in the other.

His girth was not meant for sprinting, though, and he had picked a street with a steep gradient. The officer responded fast. Stopping a Lambretta scooter, he yanked the rider off and clambered on. Yelling to an armed constable standing nearby to jump onto the pillion, he chased Hamid. As the scooter revved up the slope, everyone on the street ran in confusion and the officer did not notice Hamid's comrades

in the crowd. Telling the constable to cock his rifle, he stopped the scooter, grabbed the gun and fired twice. It was a .303, enough to fell an ox. The first bullet hit Hamid's leg. The second hit his torso.

'Wei mauji,' the boy cried for his mother and fell into a ditch beside the road, his innards spilling out of his ripped side.

The blood gushing into the gutter electrified the crowd that had been running pell-mell. United suddenly, they turned in a screaming storm upon the policemen. Both ran like whipped dogs into the police station across the road but the scooter they had commandeered was stoned and soon ablaze. Suddenly, an autorickshaw hurtled down the street and a hand like an angel's pulled Hamid into the vehicle, then sped back south towards the city centre. The girl who had rescued Hamid took him to a nursing home but he was arrested from there a few hours later and shifted to Kashmir's medical institute, his life dangling by a thread.

{15}

One Woman's Rights

Let us step back for a moment and look at the big picture. As the Soviet Union collapsed, ending the world's grandest experiment in multi-ethnic community, democracy was touted as a universal panacea—an all-American liberty–equality combo. Kashmir was agog too, since the 1987 electoral rigging had given it a peg to hang all its frustrations on. Kashmir blamed India for the fact that democracy had not worked there. And indeed, India had much to answer for. The Union government had always installed whoever it liked in power—and made deals with each of those state governments to increase the Union's control over the state. The bureaucrats who designed state policy after Nehru thought in terms of administrative procedures and powers. They were not equipped to envisage or cater to the ephemeral patterns of people's aspirations and perceptions, which twentieth-century economic structures and communication technologies had suddenly given immense salience.

However, in blaming the Union, Kashmir neglected the role of the Kashmiri leaders who actually rigged elections, even at times when the Union did not particularly want them to. Nor did Kashmir introspect on the fact that it had at various times accepted those leaders and participated in the power games they engineered. People in some Indian states are routinely killed during elections, so keenly do they prize the right to decide who rules them. Kashmir, on the other hand, had staked little to claim or protect its rights, allowing its leaders from Abdullah on to subvert elections. That could be explained as the indifference of a people waiting for an entirely new dispensation. But then, beyond 'the right to self-determination', Kashmir by and large had no idea what system it wanted.

The reason why democracy had not yet taken root in Kashmir went deeper than ambivalence about its collective goals: Kashmir baulked at sacrificing individual desires to any system for the collective good. Too many Kashmiris were like Ali Sheikh, happy to switch loyalty from one regime to its rival through the 1980s, depending on which local leader was in a position to get him contracts and patronage. Kashmir's bubbling entropy, that key to liberty, was greater than Europe's but, for democracy to work, the desire for liberty needs to be tempered by a spirit of equality, fair play, the accommodation of others' rights. In multi-ethnic societies, equality invariably runs up against the primal competitive struggle for the survival of genes, leading ethnic groups—Jews, Hispanic and African Americans, for example—to form alliances. That calls not only for egalitarian doctrines but a culture of social responsibility that can overcome the natural tendency to go overboard in the competition to survive.

That sort of culture is rare. Liberty's greed generally leads to exploitation—equality's apotheosis. So, liberal democracy works best when it guarantees equality to a select group and focusses exploitation at those outside the pale. Ancient Rome's democracy rested on armies of slaves and sprawling colonies. And in Renaissance Europe, democracy grew over a couple of centuries of emigration by the impoverished, in tandem with industrial growth buoyed by wealth sucked from slave colonies. Most north European nations had the additional advantage of Protestant faiths that calibrated liberties with puritanical restraint and commitment to community service. Plus, puritan thrift financed industrial powerhouses that could later sustain liberal lifestyles.

Kashmir though had generally exploited other communities and castes at home. Sheikh Abdullah had tried early on to forge a common purpose, but had largely failed. Even after tearing down the old feudal order, his people had engaged in an unseemly scramble for each to establish himself near the apex of a social hierarchy, albeit an imagined one. Neither communism nor religion had eased Kashmir's individual and communal insecurities enough to allow it to design a collective future.

Repressive systems try to bring order to societies in which a spirit of equality has not taken root. These are sometimes benevolent

dictatorships but, particularly when they try to control individualists seeking liberty, are more likely to be feudal, patriarchal, fascist or totalitarian. As word spread that Islamist bands too were now being trained and armed across the Line of Control, some gangs—the Allah Tigers among them—took to destroying liquor vends in Srinagar, and then video libraries and cinemas too. These were vulgar, they argued. Extending puritan fundamentalism to preclude temptation, they threw acid at the faces of women wearing make-up and some of these gangs announced that any woman who did not veil herself from head to foot would meet the same fate.

This was a crucial test. The acceptance of equal rights for women, and their liberty to make individual choices, had become a touchstone of modern democracy. Kashmir could choose to reject the idea, as Iran had. Gender equality was after all a new movement, which the unprecedented wealth of late-twentieth-century Europe and North America had nurtured. Nineteenth-century English and Japanese capitalism had flourished on the virtual slave labour of women and children, and French women had only got to vote after the Second World War. The infusion of money from New Delhi had by this time given Kashmir the trappings of contemporary Western lifestyle. Although dissatisfaction over planned development had led it to reject New Delhi altogether, it had to choose now whether it wanted to take its newfound lifestyle to its logical conclusion—individual liberties—or let its future be dictated by militant puritans.

Kashmir of course wanted the flush of religious accomplishment without losing its freewheeling indulgences. It found itself fumbling with questions over whether it was engaged in a freedom struggle—and if so, for what national ideals—or in a fundamentalist jihad. It would not find an answer until it first figured out a social contract that accepted each citizen's duties along with his or her liberties. Its destiny depended on what social contract it chose. Jousting on the backs of those competing notions of identity—Islamist and ethnic—were rival value systems, models that could determine the economic future of Kashmir as much as its political future. But the JKLF boys who were riding high that winter of 1989 had only woolly notions of a future that brimmed with liberties, which also wore the halo of Islamic sanction. In fact, without any plan or programme, they simply

tumbled from one violent act to another as if they were playing out the script of a B-grade Bollywood action film. For the moment then, Hamid's brothers-in-arms were intent only on recovering him from the government's custody.

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Although mainstream India began with neither entropy nor wealth, those keys to liberal lifestyles, Mahatma Gandhi's vision had turned asceticism—the abnegation that not only India's ancient sages but Jesus too had taught—into a community virtue rather than an individual one. The concern for the common weal that Gandhi infused at deeply emotional and spiritual levels allowed Nehru to coalesce a nation state from a set of agrarian peoples that barely remembered their civilization's acme. It was nothing short of miraculous, the first attempt ever to build a liberal democracy that unconditionally abjured exploitation—and among an impoverished set of the most disparate peoples in the world, divided by antipathies of caste, creed and other sorts of ethnicity. Without the self-denial that Gandhi had infused, nothing more than an empire dominated by one ethnic group, or an unsteady coalition of several, could have ruled a country as diverse as India.

But by the end of the 1980s, sadly, India as a whole had become a little like Kashmir. The accommodation of others on which the republic was built had given way as the once-naked hungry masses learnt how to work the levers of electoral politics and compete against each other. A substantial middle class had grown, upwardly mobile in market-driven disorder. And across India's vast rural stretches, where agrarian productivity could not sustain individualism, liberal democracy had led to caste alliances—for centuries of endogamy had turned castes into India's ethnic groups. These alliances had become a kaleidoscope of flux as agrarian stimuli changed economic standing. Traditional sharecroppers and cowherds had gained sufficient clout in the agrarian economy to reach for political power too. The natural conflict between different ethnic alliances that Gandhi had with spiritual force repressed was ready then to burst into the open.

Two new templates emerged over the old template of religious exclusivity: one a template of regional ethnic aspiration and the other

of exclusive caste aspirations. (What happened in Kashmir would directly strengthen or weaken at least two of these templates—those of regional and religious exclusivity.) Across India, all three were by the late 1980s in attrition against the Gandhian ideal of open-ended confraternity on which the republic had been founded.

At the end of an unsettling round of general elections, a man called V.P. Singh had emerged as prime minister in November 1989. He hailed from the caste of kings that, like Hari Singh, had lost power. Aware that his coalition—propped in an unstable Parliament by the Hindu right and communists—could not last, he thought he would conjure a new social constituency from the chaos of castes. The newly dominant backward castes would join with Muslims and his own dispossessed kinsmen—or so he calculated. The key to success was roping Muslims into this new alliance and so he looked for a Muslim to place in a high profile position, one who could pose no threat to him.

Mufti Sayeed, who had rebuilt the Congress in Kashmir over a decade, had joined Singh after the Rajiv–Farooq pact had left him with nothing. So the new prime minister made him India's home minister. Years later, Singh would acknowledge that he had thought not of Kashmir but of 'the larger context' while making that appointment. Mufti had in any case been elected to Parliament from India's heartland, for Kashmir had that year entirely dismissed the farce that its politicians had turned elections into. It behaved just as in 1931—with the dramatic gesture of a mass election boycott—but was utterly unprepared for its greatest test. As it floated in a dream world where the social contract contained only rights and no duties, Kashmir was suddenly confronted that December with the contradictions between the struggle for its collective rights and the rights of one woman.

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That woman was Rubaiya. She was Mufti's daughter—though it is grossly unfair to describe a person of great character only as a child of her father.

One afternoon in early December, there was a sharp nip in the air as she left the hospital named for Kashmir's dervish grandmother, Lal Ded, in a congested bit of the city, not far from Ishfaq's home.

Hospitals are not kind to interns and Rubaiya was tired after a long shift. She did not notice a small Maruti car and a mini-van inching along behind her. Layers of dirt covered their number plates as they moved quietly down the frenetic street towards the bus stop. A few minutes later, she squeezed into a seat on a bus and sat back as it bumped and rattled. A car drew up beside her window a couple of times, but she did not notice the boys in it. It was only when Ishfaq and Yasin boarded with another comrade, a little before the road crossed the Highway Bypass, that she realized with a start she was living a nightmare.

The duo ordered the driver to drive straight on instead of turning onto the bypass—on which her father's rambling new mansion was just a kilometre away. The driver obeyed silently after a frightened glance at the pistols and rifles, now out of the boys' phirans. Javed and half a dozen others had already sprinkled themselves around the bus. Rubaiya rolled her eyes silently, grateful that the victim was not her younger brother. She had thought of his safety a lot since their father had become India's home minister but had not dreamt that she could be a target. Being the only one in the family who commuted by bus, she was of course the sitting duck. Her brother—born after three girls—drove a car to college.

Ishfaq's brains had been wracked frenziedly since Hamid's arrest. A year before, he had vowed to burn the city when Yasin had been caught in a raid further down the bypass. Thinking on his toes, he had telephoned a police officer with a tip about his own whereabouts and then ambushed the officer when he led another raid to get him. A swap had swiftly been arranged then, quietly. But the stakes were higher in Hamid's case. The world knew he had been caught.

Eager for another swap, Ishfaq had decided to abduct the daughter of a Pandit National Conference leader, P.L. Handoo, but discovered after following a girl for a while that she was an unrelated Handoo. After Mufti became home minister, the boys decided to abduct his daughter instead. They had followed Rubaiya the previous afternoon too but Ishfaq had not given the signal. He was only checking for covert security. There was none. Now he made the driver stop under a huge chinar, close to which another little car was waiting. Then the boys turned to her and, motioning with their guns, ordered her off the bus. Her teeth clenched, she refused. The rest of the bus watched silently while Rubaiya grittily stood her ground alone. The boys looked uneasily at Ishfaq but he was chary of manhandling a girl. As she would recall years later, it was Yasin who, getting a measure of her, said quietly that she could either get off the bus herself or they could drag her off. The choice was hers.

She sat still for a moment, her mind churning. Then she got off. Minutes later, she was in the car gliding down the bypass and on towards Sopore. Some of the boys held the other passengers back for an hour. Then Javed and a companion, whom everyone called Saleem 'Nanha' or Nanhaji, drove with the driver to a terminus. While the younger boy was warning the driver not to report the abduction, Javed vanished in an auto-rickshaw—straight to the cluster of press offices around Pratap Park. Javed may have been a master blaster but he was also a slave of publicity. By early evening, the world knew everything that he knew about the abduction.

He knew not where she had been taken, though. Wary of his glad eye, Ishfaq had hit him and firmly ordered that he was not to go near the girl.

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Moosa Raza had been named for the Prophet Moses but, far from being able to part the waters of a sea, he had not even the power to conjure a cloak. Shivering on the dark tarmac, he turned to a police officer and asked for something warm. The officer promptly took off his parka and gave it to him. Moosa would live in it for the next five days.

It was 6 o'clock on the morning of 9 December 1989 and Moosa had just got off the tiny security force aircraft that had carried him to Srinagar from Delhi. With him had come the director of the National Security Guard and Amarjit Singh Dulat, the head of the Intelligence Bureau's Kashmir desk. It had been a horrible night for Moosa. He was chief secretary of the Jammu and Kashmir state government. Visiting Delhi the previous day, he had arrived at the new home minister's office for what was meant to be a 'courtesy call'. It was the worst possible time for any sort of call from the head of Kashmir's

administration. When Moosa walked into the room, Mufti had been on the telephone to Srinagar, asking for details of his daughter's abduction. Word of it had reached him just a few minutes before.

Nobody could find out very much. After a series of tense meetings, Moosa was told late at night to go and take charge. The weather was vile as they flew through dark clouds and he heard frantic instructions from ground control that the plane was veering too low or too close to the mountains. But that flight and his arrival in sub-zero weather were only the opening scenes of Moosa's nightmare. Until the next evening, nothing moved except the pitch of the cabinet secretary's voice on the telephone from Delhi. Sometimes disparaged as 'bulldog' or 'Alsatian', the cabinet secretary was a difficult man. Some of his colleagues said behind his back that he was a bully with juniors, sycophantic with bosses. Now he demanded half-hourly reports from Moosa—in Tamil, so that nobody in Srinagar could follow. Although it was his mother tongue, Moosa's Tamil was rusty and he felt like he was wandering in a fog with a banshee at his back.

When a portly, bearded journalist among the Intelligence Bureau's contacts finally put him in touch with Ishfaq's father, he began negotiations—acutely aware all the while that he was dealing with a vastly subordinate official. To set the tone, Moosa began by offering a cigarette. Then he asked that the boys shelve their demand for Butt's remains. Ishfaq had announced soon after the abduction that they wanted five militants released and Maqbool Butt's bones exhumed from Delhi's Tihar jail and brought to Kashmir. Then, within hours, word had been sent that they wanted Waza instead of the fifth man on their list, but Hamid's name remained on top. Moosa stressed Islamic values: justice, Rubaiya's innocence. Ishfaq's father countered that the boys in custody were struggling for a just cause and against the rigging of the 1987 elections. Moosa delicately sidestepped that one.

Hamid was all his brothers-in-arms really wanted but since the boy was on life support systems in an intensive care unit, Moosa was told he could be flown to Pakistan, or to London, or driven to the Line of Control and handed to Pakistan, or to the Pakistan embassy in New Delhi, or to a third country. Moosa turned down all those options but agreed finally that Hamid alone would be released in Srinagar.

The deal lasted barely a few hours. At 2 a.m., a boy slipped into Ishfaq's house with a letter for his father. Stay out of this, it said.

Then Yasin telephoned to say the same. A senior doctor from Srinagar's medical institute, whom Ishfaq respected, would negotiate. That was not the only change. Even while Moosa had been negotiating, a Kashmiri Pandit judge who had been transferred to another high court arrived in Srinagar. Mufti trusted him as his own.

The next afternoon, the portly journalist who had arranged Moosa's negotiations barged breathlessly into the Intelligence Bureau's office in an old stone mansion on the road to the palace. Choking, he said the boys had threatened to kill him for 'double-crossing' them after the judge told them Delhi was willing to release all five. Immediately.

When Moosa checked, he was told the judge was in charge.

Farooq, who had been in London, returned that day and was livid when his cabinet told him they had decided to call the boys' bluff but had been kept out of the loop. He threatened to sack Moosa but simmered down after the cabinet secretary growled over the phone. So the judge dictated terms, sitting on a sofa in a ministerial bungalow, flanked by the doctor from the institute and a lawyer—the JKLF's twin patrons. They not only wanted all five prisoners, they wanted three hours for them to disappear before the girl was released. Moosa demurred. A simultaneous exchange was the most he was willing to brook. After a cabinet meeting, the state government announced at midnight that it was willing to release all five but that they would be exchanged simultaneously with the girl. The cabinet secretary endorsed that over the telephone.

An hour later, he called back, his tone very different. Moosa would record, and some of the ministers and officials who had been sitting at the prime minister's residence that night would confirm, that he spoke thus:

> This is the cabinet secretary to the Government of India, speaking to the chief secretary of Jammu and Kashmir. I am speaking from the chamber of the prime minister of India. The cabinet secretary desires the state government to note that it is their undiluted responsibility to ensure the safe release of the hostage without any injury to her and we expect that all action you take will be consistent with this requirement.

He bit off each word of that threat. The prime minister sat opposite—in the drawing room of the little bungalow he had been given when he was a despised opposition leader. Several of the new ministers were sprinkled morosely around the room.

The government in New Delhi had been severely distressed over the past few days. Mufti sahib's daughter must be released at any cost, the external affairs minister, I.K. Gujral, had kept repeating earnestly. He liked the prime minister's plan to woo Muslims. How could they just sit there on their nether-sides, civil aviation minister Arif Mohammed Khan had thundered. Being Muslim, he wanted Mufti to know he was not a rival. Negotiations must be pushed, George Fernandes, the eager railway minister, had insisted. And the cabinet secretary, who had no doubt heard that the prime minister's favourite astrologer was getting ready to take his place, had huffed that he would handle it.

Two cabinet ministers—Gujral and Arif—flew to Srinagar on a special flight to ensure that the implicit threat to dismiss the state government had been absorbed. Sitting with Farooq in his hamam in the dark hours of the next morning, they heard Moosa and other officers explain the situation. Arif said that the cabinet had not known all this and they should discuss it with the prime minister. But Gujral, who Farooq thought could barely stay awake, had arrived with his mind made up: the decision had been taken and had to be implemented.

Farooq had been beside himself when Moosa had woken him earlier that night. 'They will destroy Kashmir,' he had expostulated. Faced with the threat, however, he fell in line. Few chief ministers would at that stage have sacrificed power over how to handle terrorism, and Farooq was in an especially sticky situation. On the one hand, there was a whisper campaign in Delhi that he patronized the JKLF boys. On the other, the victim was his long-standing antagonist's daughter.

After the prisoners were released, the doctor from the institute drove Nanhaji towards Sopore to fetch Rubaiya. The boy would recount musing as he looked out of the window that they could have transported tons of ammunition that day. Not a single security bunker was occupied. When he reached the house where Rubaiya was being held captive, leaving the doctor and the lawyer at a petrol pump on the main road, the 5 o'clock Gujjar News was just beginning on the

radio. Rubaiya Sayeed had been released, it relayed. With a grin, he turned to her and said they could kill her now. Her stupid government had announced that they had her back.

Rubaiya tossed her mane, unmoved. Nothing that he or the other boys had said had excited her fear, only indignation. Kashmiri women had long been a sheet anchor, dominating homes and setting limits beyond which they would not yield. Indifferent to Ishfaq's volatile temper, Rubaiya had told him archly late one evening that, if he followed the tenets of Islam, he should not even be standing in the same room with her. He had retreated darkly, murmuring that she was an *amanat*, held in trust. The next time he came, she told him evenly that he was barking up the wrong tree. If she knew her father, they would get nothing.

She did not know a father's heart.

Now she smirked at the boy who tried to frighten her. Saying she knew where they were, she waved a notebook at Nanhaji. Neatly covered in brown paper, it bore the name, class and address of the house owner's son. The boys had tried to clear the room of anything that might help her identify it but had neglected the school notebook lying in a corner of the cupboard. Now the young man was reduced to pleading but she would make no promises. She still held her head high as she got into the car. As they moved towards Srinagar, though, her blood ebbed. Her face slowly crumpled. Outside her window, Kashmir was exulting. Bursting crackers. Dancing on the roads. Crazed with joy. When fear finally found her, it was not terror of death. It was horror—the horror of confronting Kashmir's cynical egocentricity.

Her people had felt for her, clucking endlessly around kitchen fires and steaming cups of tea, but it had all been the emotional outpouring that was their second nature. Not empathy. And as always, behind and around that outpouring had lurked an irascible hope that the boys would get away with it. Hope sat easily with fear in Kashmir's traumatized breast. Divergent emotions came naturally.

It was Rubaiya alone who felt crushed that day by the ordeal she had been put through. 'I felt betrayed by my own people,' she would say of that drive home. 'For me, that was the most traumatic part.'

Institutional democracy had for decades perched uncertainly between a paranoid government in New Delhi and an autocratic one in Srinagar. As Kashmir's aspirations erupted in the aftermath of the Rubaiya episode, it was squeezed most unbecomingly that winter.

His entire cabinet watched as Farooq Abdullah stalked into a meeting one morning, his face scarlet, lower lip curled. Little beads of perspiration defied the January cold on his forehead. Snatching one of the telephones arrayed next to his chair, he spoke to the general secretary of India's largest communist party. Jagmohan was coming back as governor, Farooq told him, letting loose a torrent of angry words. Clipping his syllables to keep from slipping into abuse, he said he would resign the moment Jagmohan was appointed. Wiping his florid brow with a snow-white handkerchief, he picked up the phone again. In the next twenty minutes, he had spoken to the general secretary of India's other major communist party and several others with influence—including the maverick socialist George Fernandes.

Both communist general secretaries returned his calls while his ministers still sat there, pale. The Union government seemed to have made up its mind, said both. They had communicated Farooq's threat but it had not cut much ice. Don't worry, he will never resign, he is a playboy who loves the perks of office too much, Mufti had drawled liltingly each time, with a chuckle that emerged in a series of wheezing-guttural snorts. Actually, Farooq's high-pitched protests only helped Mufti make up his mind. Long convinced that Kashmir was better off without the Abdullahs in power, he would have sent Jagmohan if only to unseat Farooq. And in the bargain, Mufti might finally have got the job he craved. For Kashmiris of his generation, the sun still set in Gulmarg.

A change of governor had not been on the cards in mid-December. When Krishna Rao had sent a handwritten note to the president, a fellow Brahmin from south India, offering to resign if the new government wanted, the president had told him not to worry. Then, in the last week of December, the home secretary had telephoned Moosa and mentioned three names on the shortlist for alternative governor: Naresh Chandra, K.F. Rustomji and Krishna Kant. But Rajiv's cousin, Jagmohan's old mentor, had by then begun to lobby. Like Mufti, he too had joined the new prime minister when Rajiv had distanced him. Mufti came round to the idea quite soon. Moosa flew to Delhi

to argue that it would dislodge Farooq. One of Moosa's predecessors (and immediate successor), R.K. Takkar, too spoke up. But neither made any impact.

A few days later, several leftists rolled their eyes and smacked their lips at the spicy, luscious mutton they were served at one of New Delhi's largest bungalows. It was Mufti's residence and Jagmohan's candidature was gently promoted over dinner. The left flank fell in line. The prime minister cleared it too but told Mufti a few days later of the misgivings he had heard over the telephone. He would acknowledge a decade later that he added no instructions though.

So it came about that on 18 January 1990, the governor and the chief minister got calls from the president's secretary. He was issuing the warrant appointing Jagmohan as the new governor, he told them. Farooq telephoned Rajiv, asking for a meeting, and rushed to Delhi along with a couple of ministers. M.L. Fotedar and Mir Qasim were among those who joined Rajiv to try and persuade Farooq not to resign. Farooq returned the same day, turning up flushed at the governor's house late at night, after a cabinet meeting that had formally endorsed his decision to resign. Krishna Rao too tried to dissuade him, arguing that the people would suffer, but, expostulating expletives, Farooq replied that Jagmohan would do to him again what he had the last time. 'That will only go in your favour politically,' reasoned Krishna Rao, but Farooq was adamant.

The governor phoned Moosa, who arrived soon after midnight to find Krishna Rao and Farooq descending the bank of white stairs in front of the governor's mansion. Krishna Rao glumly handed him Farooq's resignation which stated he would not continue as caretaker. He even left his official car behind. Turning to Moosa, Krishna Rao said there was a constitutional crisis. There was no government at that moment and he did not even have the authority to accept the resignation in case his own resignation had been accepted.

In the early hours of January 19, the fax machine at the president's house began to hum. It was a message from Krishna Rao: the government of Jammu and Kashmir had resigned and there was no viable alternative. If the president permitted, governor's rule may be imposed and the assembly placed in suspended animation. Did the president wish him to do it, or leave the task to his replacement?

The president was seething when he spoke to the prime minister

in the morning. The home secretary telephoned Krishna Rao soon after to ask how much time His Excellency would require to hand over charge.

'I am packed and ready to go,' Krishna Rao replied through clenched teeth.

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In the wee hours of 20 January, a long line of silent headlights slid eerily through the cold mist, down a road beside the high court. At the edge of the inner city, the convoy of jeeps, trucks and buses slowed to a halt and a company of the Central Reserve Police Force headed into narrow lanes between rows of dilapidated houses. At 4 a.m., doors burst open all over Chota Bazar as policemen's boots and rifle butts broke through. Over the next hour, they dragged hundreds of groggy, frightened men out of beds, hitting and abusing. Some in their slippers, some still barefoot, the able-bodied men of Chota Bazar were bundled into a dozen buses and trucks. As women wailed and children screamed, shivering as they cowered in the icy cold, the convoy moved away. Kashmir's first cordon-and-search operation was complete.

It had not been twelve hours since Jagmohan had taken the oath of office in Jammu. He knew nothing of the operation. Nor did Farooq, who had resigned the previous night. The operation had been initiated a few days earlier when the director general of police had been sitting in Qamarwari at the western edge of the inner city at the house of a prominent minister, Iftekhar Ansari. The police brass was there to discuss security for him. When the distant sound of gunfire echoed as they sat there, the director general had turned with a frown and demanded of his subordinates where the firing had come from.

Many of the boys hide downtown, sir, and they sometimes fire in the air, was the nervous reply. It is nothing really, sir, his subordinates tried to tell him, but the director general did not think it was nothing. Which areas did they hide in, he demanded.

Chota Bazar, sir, one of his officers shot back, not wanting to mention the real hideouts in the heart of the inner city closer by. That was his responsibility and he might get suspended. Right there, the director general ordered that Chota Bazar be searched and militants identified.

Farooq Abdullah had approved cordon-and-search operations in principle a few days earlier but the director general had little idea how explosive such operations could be if not handled with care. An honest, earnest man with little experience of ground-level police work, he had spent most of his career in the Intelligence Bureau before Mufti had dispatched him in the wake of Rubaiya's abduction the previous month.

On the fateful morning of 20 January, he was in Jammu with the new governor while the Central Reserve Police Force ferried its prisoners to Hari Niwas palace. To Kashmir, that expansive white Renaissance house with sweeping stairs across the front and a magnificent view of the placid Dal from the large windows above had always seemed dully ominous. It had just been completed when the tribesmen had swept in. And for years, it had been the headquarters of police intelligence. That morning, the place looked decidedly bleak under an overcast sky that occasionally drizzled. The men of Chota Bazar filled the grounds like ants across the oval lawns. Shivering with fear as much as the cold, they were ordered to look towards the upstairs windows, from which police sleuths and agents tried to identify militants among them. Over the next few hours, twenty-four were picked and taken in for interrogation. The rest were given tea, their first refreshment since they had gone to bed, and puris. The constables from the plains would have called that a decent breakfast but many Kashmiris barely knew what puris were.

By late afternoon, they were ferried back and left to walk the last kilometre or so home. The city was in an uproar by then. Through the morning, news of how Chota Bazar had been rounded up had spread like wildfire. Kashmir had been energized by Rubaiya's abduction and little processions spilt onto the streets all over the city that day. Bonfires of old tyres and packing crates were lit and tendrils of smoke twined with wisps of mist, together wafting up an antiphony of chants: freedom and Islam.

The sole (state-owned) television channel had slotted a news feature for that evening: an elaborate report on Ceausescu, the dictator of Romania. It graphically showed his regime collapsing before a tide of angry citizens coursing through the streets of the capital. It was inspiring and word spread across the city. People carried samovars of tea and plastic bags of bread and biscuits to neighbourhood mosques,

to chant slogans over muezzins' microphones through the night. Some carried metal plates to bang. Others brought preachers to rend the night air with fiery exhortation.

Only in the enclave of the establishment was Srinagar quiet that night. The silence was broken by a telephone ring in a large bedroom in the cantonment. Reaching for the light switch, Lieutenant General Zaki looked at his watch on the bedside table. His eyebrows arched. It was midnight.

The voice at the other end was familiar. It was the director general of military operations, who had been a friend for decades. He was surprised to hear that the corps commander was asleep. He had been told Srinagar was burning, he said. Frightened Pandits had kept several telephones jangling in New Delhi.

That was the first Zaki had heard of the trouble in the city sprawled to the north-west. He knew Kashmir well, for he had commanded a division at Baramula a few years before. Kashmir was very capable of sudden eruptions, but was not basically violent, he knew. He nevertheless roused his brigadier general, staff and told him to find out what was happening. The brigadier took three jeeps and drove through the city. Apart from little fires that some demonstrators still kept going, Srinagar was not burning, he reported.

Next morning, Zaki put on his dress uniform and went to the governor's residence. Stepping up when Jagmohan arrived from Jammu around noon, he saluted smartly. Looking haggard, the governor told him the situation was so bad, he would like Zaki to take charge.

Zaki saluted again and stepped back. 'Don't worry, sir,' he said, and drove back to the cantonment, taking along the director general of police, who had accompanied Jagmohan from Jammu. Jagmohan was not in Zaki's chain of command but when the corps was later asked to explain on whose orders it had moved out of barracks that day, its reply was succinct: on the corps commander's orders.

Zaki changed into fatigues and drove to Gowkadal. It was centre stage that day. The previous day's effervescence had been redoubled by television's focus on Romania and the night filled with the noise of freedom resounding from mosques. Defying curfew, people had been on the streets since morning, shouting, gesticulating. When Javed had emerged from upper crust Rajbagh, people had been drawn to

him like bees to honey, yelling cries of freedom and Islam—'*Hum kya chate? Azadi*', '*Nara-e-taqbir, Allah-o-akbar*'. Four or five thousand were behind him by the time he turned towards Lal Chowk, women bunched together behind the men. From there, he turned towards Yasin's home, beyond which he could cross Gowkadal to Chota Bazar.

Most of the men had just crossed the bridge and the women were just getting to it when a shot rang out. Then hell burst staccato from the barrel of a carbine in the hands of a Central Reserve Police Force officer at the far end of the bridge and the self-loading rifles of his men. Their bursts ripped on for interminable minutes. Women fell back screaming. Men oozing blood fell over each other.

A civil engineer who claimed he had got unintentionally caught in that procession reported that the dark, stocky officer who had first fired had chased those at the front, carbine blazing, then returned to fire again at the bridge. The officer yelled frenziedly through those bursts that if they wanted Pakistan, he would give them Pakistan. The propaganda of Vajpayee's party's patrons had taught a post-Gandhian generation of Indians the two-nation theory. All Muslims were Pakistanis to them, and that was the hate filled prism through which they perceived Kashmir's dreams of independence—and its resentment at being ruled from beyond its walls.

According to a senior police officer who saw the bodies, three dozen bodies were tossed into a van and taken to the police control room from Gowkadal. Only after that did the shocked residents of the area, who had been cowering since the firing began, dare to take the wounded indoors. Speechless horror was just giving way to explosive anger when Zaki arrived.

He ordered an announcement in Kashmiri from the mosque speaker that no one was to come out. Then, taking the director general with him, he marched into a narrow lane to talk to the men who were banging on a door from inside a mosque. Perhaps it was the same mosque at which Abdullah Shirazi had held congregations spellbound before he was invited to chair the Islamic Students' League. That mosque too had been at Gowkadal. Fire tenders were turning their hoses to full power by then to wash the blood off the bridge. With that blood, the ashes of Jagmohan's copybook too were washed into the filthy river.

Jagmohan had meant well. He later mused in a messianic reverie about taking over the governor's mansion that afternoon:

> With my mind full of righteous indignation over the sad and sorry conditions of the country's politics, I entered Raj Bhawan. It looked so lonely, so silent. Nevertheless, it seemed to be taking a gloomy pride in standing as a lonely sentinel over the sad stillness of the vast Dal lake whose flat and aging bosom reflected the frozen turbulence of my mind.

Kashmir could trump such distraught angst any day—effortlessly.

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Discovering Jihad

Aftab missed the peak of Kashmir's uprising through that winter of 1989–90. Quite soon after Guga returned from Muzaffarabad, having failed to get the ISI to accept Hizbullah, Aftab persuaded Guga to let him try. So he crossed the Line of Control in November 1989, just as a new government was taking charge in New Delhi and Ishfaq and his band were desperately looking for a way to get Hamid Sheikh released.

He wound his way cautiously through the countryside to the edge of the valley, where four boys who had fallen behind their groups joined him. Two were from Hilal's outfit and two from Zargar's but Aftab liked the thought that he was their leader for the crossing. He looked for the most experienced guides to take them across the mountains. The guides confidently promised to get them across in a day. They knew routes that were never patrolled. Indeed, few were in 1989. But Aftab was supercilious. A city slick with Syed airs, he talked down to the Gujjars, the goatherds on Kashmir's peripheries who functioned as guides. What could they know how important he was—deputy chief commander of the army of God. So he decreed that they would move only at night.

The climb was steep and, as they wound through the forests of pines and conifers, it began to rain. They slipped and stumbled in the dark. There were no trees the second night and the rain turned to sleet and the mud and pebbles on the tracks to slush. There were no streams either and punctilious Aftab would not drink water from the muddy pools. Gritting his teeth, he kept his mind on thoughts of God and victory, to keep it off the thirst and the blisters on his soft feet. He would not complain in front of his companions; the pain never dulled his sense of importance.

That night, he stumbled so often and so badly that it was all he could do to keep going, grabbing desperately, breathless from terror as he slipped on the wet mud under his boots. When he was about to plummet into the abyss at one point, every fibre of his being plugged into his tearing fingers, scrabbling for a hold on jagged edges of rock.

By the third night, the rain had stopped, but by then Aftab's pride was no match for exhaustion. He fainted. His companions muttered disgustedly about his fear of daylight as they quickly lit a little fire and rubbed his hands and legs beside it until he revived. That fire put them at far greater risk of being spotted than sunlight could. Finally, all the tension and some of the exhaustion melted away after they crossed the Line of Control. They were welcomed like bridegrooms on the slopes beyond but Aftab could not help staring at the tall, angular people who were so warmly offering him sweetmeats. They looked so much like the Gujjars Kashmiris disparaged. It was easy to see how much of an ethnic patchwork the state Hari Singh's forefathers had conquered was.

A little refreshed, Aftab and his companions walked another four hours to the road and got gratefully into a car for Muzaffarabad. That too was a shock. Muzaffarabad was no better than tiny Ramban on the highway from Jammu, Aftab thought to himself. It was the capital of what Pakistan called Azad Kashmir but it was less developed than even small towns in Kashmir. Still, the sights and sounds of people revived him. His first thought was that he could not possibly be seen like this. So he found a barber in a tiny wooden shack, sporting a broken piece of mirror in front of a rickety chair and a plastic sheet stretched across the doorframe. But he felt good for the shave. After he had a bath, he asked the way to the office of Babar's new outfit. There, he made sure he mentioned that he was Shabir's cousin but the man in charge was not impressed. The prospect still seemed bleak for Guga's pan-Islamist dream: an army of God in Kashmir.

Aftab became insistent over the next few days, losing no opportunity to state that he was the commander of Hizbullah. But it did no good. As long as Hizbullah was not on their list of approved outfits, the ISI's facilitators treated him like just another recruit, there for militant training. He was soon dispatched to a training camp.

As soon as he arrived, he became tense, insisting he would not be packed eight to a tent like the rest. He was a commander, he said

politely. So they gave him a two-man tent. He felt lonely there. He read by candlelight on most nights to occupy his wandering mind, for only the trainer's tent had a kerosene lantern, and the thin candle in Aftab's tent left dark spaces for memories of home to creep in. He often stared wistfully at the dim twinkling lights of a hamlet in the far distance. It was the only sign of life, for he could see nobody across the dry, stony expanse by day, only the dots of other camps in the distance—unreachable dots, for the trainees had strict orders never to stray from their camp. When the tears began to prick on those dark nights, Aftab would quietly light a banned cigarette, looking furtively around for any trainer on the prowl.

It was not just the loneliness that depressed him. He could not get used to not having running water. Tankers would arrive every day to pour water into huge drums. That was used for the ritual wash before prayers but Aftab was used to indulgent baths, the clean smell of his freshly talced body. The food was worse: what they called dal was a glutinous, lumpy broth. And it was a fixture, slopped daily onto every plate, with rotis and sometimes a vegetable curry. There would occasionally be camel meat but never mutton. Worst of all, they rarely got rice.

One morose morning, he was so depressed that he could not get out of his sleeping bag. He was lying there when the chief instructor, inspecting the camp as he did once a day, spotted him. He was a swashbuckling man from Bangladesh, who could shoot as if he were in a classic Western, firing behind his straight, black hair, or between his legs, always hitting bulls-eye. Faced with staccato questioning, Aftab pretended to be ill. His glib answers provoked more questions, though, until the instructor got to know that he was a lawyer, and a commander. After that, he often sought Aftab out for a chat.

The boy felt better then. The chief instructor was his friend.

The relationship between Islamic mobilization and Kashmir's struggle to secede from India had been muddled in Aftab's mind until January 1990, when he glimpsed the powerful reality of transnational jihad for the first time. Primed already by Guga's doctrines, he was drawn quite easily into its neat black-and-white world, but at an emotional

rather than an analytical level. He did not grapple yet with what it meant for his identity, aspirations or culture.

His shoes sank softly with every step and the wind wafted dust in gusts across the vast open plain but Aftab's thoughts were elevated far above the dust. It was a blessing, he thought to himself, to be a part of this vast throng. There seemed to be millions there—all devout Muslims, judging by their clothes and serious beards. Never in Hindu India could he have had this experience, he thought.

He was wrong. Aspirant middle class India was unsteadily donning the sort of paranoid blinkers that conflates religion with ethnicity and nationality—the sort of blinkers that had created European nation states in a welter of blood, hatred and inquisitions. India was still far behind Pakistan in strengthening that template, though. Pakistan had been founded as a nation upon that template, and that template was now evolving into a supra-national one.

When Jinnah fashioned a nation premised solely on religion, he set out incendiary props that his successors could set alight. Once East Bengal split to become Bangladesh in 1971, demolishing the two-nation theory, his successors turned to those props in desperation. To promote his party to provincial power, even the son of Frontier Gandhi, who had opposed the two-nation theory, made coalition pacts with a party of clerics, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam or Party of Islamic Scholars, from the early 1970s. Then Zulfikar Bhutto brought Islam centre stage with an Islamic Summit—a conference of heads of government from Islamic nations—in 1974. In the 1980s, Zia took succour from the Jamaat-e-Islami. And in the last year of his rule, two professors from Lahore's Engineering University joined an Arab teacher at Islamabad's International Islamic University to establish the Dawat-ul-Irshad Markaz on a 190-acre campus near Lahore. It was an extremely austere madrasa, albeit on the scale of a university. And it considered education incomplete without jihad. (Dawat, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam and Jamaat-e-Islami all acknowledged the Deoband tradition. Deoband had remained no more than a reformist school in independent India but the ambience of an Islamic state had propelled its doctrines in new directions in Pakistan.)

Having bolstered politicians who then protected them, Pakistan's major Deobandi movements turned fervently to fulfilling their new doctrinal missions. Spawning madrasas like mushrooms from the

1980s, they turned out zealots inspired to violent jihad. Ideologically, they refined Pakistan's founding template in two different ways, creating fresh fault lines for the eruption of violence. Madrasas of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam's Sami-ul Haq faction narrowed the template of separate identity, producing Sunni zealots who focussed on killing the minority Shias. On the other hand, many of those who emerged from the main faction's madrasas stretched the template from a national to a transnational one, fashioning Harkat-ul-Jehad-Islami (Harkat) for the Afghan war. Jamaat-e-Islami's Pakistan chapter was already neck-deep in that war, in cahoots with Gulbuddin Hikmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami.

When he ruled Pakistan, Zia-ul Haq had mentored the relationship between Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami and Hikmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami. Zia had wanted to use it to gain control of Afghanistan, so that Pakistan might obtain 'strategic depth' against India. So the process of stretching Pakistan's founding template to suit transnational jihad was not only the work of clerics focussed on the ummah. It was also military strategy for an insecure nation. The strategy undermined Pakistan, not only by eroding its territorial boundary but also by inviting large numbers of the poor to give vent to their frustrations through the new fault lines.

To become popular, the Islamist organizations—Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam and Dawat-ul-Irshad—vied like fashionable hostesses to throw grand parties each winter. Continued domination by feudal oligarchies in Pakistan and the consequent weakness of industrialization had created enough frustrations to let them draw crowds. Hundreds of thousands came—the poor searching for hope, the upwardly mobile for meaning—to these annual congregations around Lahore, Gujranwala and Multan through the 1990s. By the end of that decade, the Tablighi Jamaat—which was close to the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam—would draw two million, including several professionals like Aftab. Dawat-ul-Irshad would draw about a million, mainly from the poorer classes, and the Jamaat-e-Islami about half a million. Each jamboree was a show of strength—though Dawat's was also explicitly a forum to motivate young men to jihad through the narration of glorified battle experiences. It sought recruits at these conclaves for its militant wing, the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT).

Aftab was at the biggest jamboree of January 1990. He had gone with a friend, Maulana Farooq. The reserved, soft-spoken man was

Harkat's chief for operations in Kashmir. He stood on the sand, smiling beatifically, nodding once, his eyes gently shutting, as Aftab turned to say that the man at the podium would make a much better prime minister than that woman, Benazir. Aftab's mind had soared when the speaker, the businessman-politician Nawaz Sharif, had taken the mike. Ever since he had been General Zia's finance minister, Aftab had looked up to Sharif, almost as to a Kashmiri.

Aftab got on well with Maulana Farooq. Like most Kashmiri militants, Aftab understood little of the import of the templates these groups had refashioned, or of how little Kashmir's aspirations—neither transnational, nor sectarian at this juncture—fit with them. He responded to Maulana Farooq's demeanour rather than his ideas. The man was in his mid-thirties but had an air of sobriety. More often bowed on a prayer mat than chatting with friends, he always wore a cap and a waistcoat over his salwar-kameez. Aftab spent hours with him and was sometimes invited to stay for a meal. Aftab enjoyed that, for they were always served meticulously on a carpet covered with a sheet. A boy would bring around a jug and copper bowl for them to wash their hands and a bowl of fruit or even dates would follow the meal.

They suited each other. Both were unhappy with the ISI, which refused to let either launch his group into the valley. Maulana Farooq explained earnestly to ISI officers that Harkat did not need money or arms, that they received millions in donations for jihad in Afghanistan and Kashmir. But his pleas fell on deaf ears. Unknown to both, the ISI was making plans—major plans—that very month. Those plans would bring these pan-Islamist groups too into play, but not yet.

US researcher Robert Wirsing heard three years later that Benazir chaired a meeting in early February 1990 with the army chief and the ISI brass at which new plans for Kashmir were finalized. Realizing that Pakistan risked losing Gilgit too if the freedom movement gathered more steam, they decided, Wirsing heard, that the Pakistan Army should take over all the training camps and shut down the private ones. Henceforth, they would channel funds, arms, training and encouragement to only pro-Pakistan groups—which of course were the Islamist ones. Since Jamaat's ally, Hizb-e-Islami, had been

the ISI's main agent in the Afghan jihad, they decided to dominate Kashmir's insurgency too primarily through the Jamaat.

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The commander's scream was sharper than the shell's whine but both blurred into the terror spearing through Aftab's mind. He found himself flat against the jagged, dusty rocks before he knew he had dived. For several minutes then, there was silence. He strained every nerve but could not move or speak. He could hardly even breathe.

The shell had been heading straight for his head and the commander, a veteran of many battles, had spotted its trajectory. Battles in Afghanistan were as different to Kashmir's as the terrain—sprawls of vast boulders as far as the eye could see, the air often filled with billowing dust. Even the children here would have scoffed at Javed's lob-and-run heroics. Kalashnikovs were more common than water pouches and it was a machine gun or even a mortar that marked a veteran.

Aftab ached to use one but in Afghanistan he was barely accepted as a helper, carrying ammunition or holding a mortar shell. He wished sometimes to trek to Panjsher, to see if the legendary commander Ahmad Shah Masood would accept him, but that was four or five days by camel, to the east of Mahaz, to which they had come from Mazar-e-Sharif in the north. And then Masood might reject him. He glowed, though, each time tales of Masood's victories were recounted around a campfire.

Aftab loved those evenings: scores of men sitting in a cavern or in the rocky shelter of a mountain, waiting for dinner to roast on a spit. The naans were so vast that five men would tear pieces from each. His favourite evenings were those occasional ones when they roasted a whole lamb, stuffed with tomatoes, onions, spices and ghee. After turning slowly on the spit for hours, the lamb was delicious, almost better than a wazwan. The camel meat they got on most nights was tough—and so heavy it left him sweating.

He was the only Kashmiri in that group but he was glad on those evenings that he had volunteered to come. Some Harkat men had been going in early February and his friend Maulana Farooq, their chief for Kashmir, had asked if he would like to go along. To Aftab, it felt

almost like one of the basic duties of Islam to fight in the Afghan jihad. He could not have said no.

Still, he felt strange sometimes. He could not quite put a finger on it, but it was something about the place. It was different, alien. It was not just the dust that he had to use for ablutions before prayers. Nor even the bare, arid terrain. It was the people. They were good Muslims of course, but that was what was unsettling. These people had none of the complex machinations of Kashmir. They killed, were ready to be killed, content simply to go to the eternal rewards they expected in heaven. Nothing else mattered. The men were rough, illiterate, martial, contemptuous of authority unless it wore the mantle of religion. Fastidious Aftab was impressed. He noticed that the more orthodox were not only the most righteous but also the tidiest. Clean in every detail.

He almost never saw a woman. That too was so different to Kashmir. One day, he had been about to climb the stairs to the roof of the house he was in, to get a bit of fresh air, when his host warned him sharply not to go up. Thinking there might be women unveiled there, he apologized. But his host laughed. His women were all safely inside, he said. The danger was that women in the neighbour's house might be in their courtyard, visible from this roof. If they were, the neighbour would shoot Aftab dead for looking over.

Economic opportunities, or their dearth, go a long way in forming culture. Tough for agriculture, the rocky heights of southern Afghanistan had never sustained a society more complex than a strictly patriarchal tribal one. Its social structures were much more like those of ancient Israel or Arabia, both formed by the desert, than those of Kashmir. While Kashmir's fecundity had sustained great civilizational complexity, the scant resources of the Pushtun highlands had dictated that the tribe had to obediently follow its patriarch in order to survive.

The economic realities that shaped the cultural differences between Kashmir and Afghanistan emanated from geography, then, rather than religion. And those cultures determined the different patterns of their violent struggles. Both insurgencies were torn by differences over whether they were essentially nationalist or Islamist. Both were riven by internecine strife. But, while Afghanistan's was generally inter-ethnic, Kashmir's was driven more often by ego clashes. The result was apparent in the ferocity and success of the Afghan's battles. The Afghan, honed by centuries of tough struggle for the survival of his tribal gene, focussed intently on the battle at hand while the Kashmiri, secure in his fertile valley, was constantly distracted by opportunities for individual advancement.

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When he returned from Afghanistan, Aftab's eyes goggled as he stared, his mouth half-open, at the scene in Muzaffarabad. He chortled in disbelief, thinking that he would not have believed it if someone had described this at Mazar-e-Sharif. He had been away for just seven weeks but Muzaffarabad had been transformed. It looked as if a youth jamboree had descended on the sleepy little place. Handsome, fair boys with wavy curls and crooked noses roamed the little streets by the thousand. We eat sheep and we behave like sheep, Aftab thought with a grin. If one Kashmiri comes this way, every Kashmiri does.

It had begun around the 20th of February 1990, the daily trickle that became a torrent in a few days. Twelve hundred crossed on one day in late March, as if a nature walk were moving through the forests. One nine-year-old clambered across in the tide, and a ten-year-old from Maqbool Butt's village. By then, conductors were yelling, 'Pindi, Pindi', at Srinagar's Idgah, as boys in parkas and jaunty caps leapt ebulliently onto buses heading to villages near the Line of Control. Rubbing his hands with delight, Aftab turned to go into the house where he was staying. There was work to be done. He just had to get Hizbullah registered with the ISI now.

Major Tariq, who was in charge of the base camp, had no time for Aftab's pleas, though. He was frantically trying to sort out the chaos. His men had had to shut schools so that classrooms could be turned into dormitories, and send messages every other day for more blankets and trucks of wheat, rice and other food. A brigadier had taken charge of the Kashmir operation and though he was often in Muzaffarabad, he too was preoccupied—an anxious eye constantly peeled for signboards that might give anything away to the Western diplomats and media persons who had begun to prowl.

So Aftab took a bus to Islamabad. Colonel Asad, who had shown Waza around in 1988, was still handling things there and was far more amenable. He was so taken with Aftab's soft-spoken charm that the

boy became a regular visitor at his home. It took several visits, though, before his cajoling bore fruit. Hizbullah would be funded provisionally, as a separate group, he was told, but it would have to prove itself before it got more.

Aftab rushed delightedly off with the funds to set up an office in Muzaffarabad, and got his boys together to send the first batch for training. For months, he had been sending Hizbullah boys to Babar's camp and that had been a disaster. For, once they were trained and armed, that group insisted that the boys were their cadres. And Aftab was in no position to quarrel.

After returning from Afghanistan, he had requested his friend, the Harkat commander, to allow some Hizbullah boys to train at the Harkat camp. Those who got a taste of the Afghan jihad, he felt, would retain Islamic fervour even after they shaved their beards and returned home. The ISI's training, in any case, had been squeezed under the pressure of the flood to two or three rushed days.

The boys were quite happy with this compression of the training. All that most of them wanted was to go back and grab their share of hero worship. That took time, though, in the spring and summer of 1990, for organizing safe return trips was not easy. Lieutenant General Zaki's men were on the prowl now.

Muzaffarabad had a sticky time. Their fleeting training over, swarms of boys took to hanging around the women's college. The town that had beamed at the few score Kashmiri boys in January, lavishing fruit and sweets and effusively inviting strangers in for tea, now scurried indoors, slamming doors shut. Some commanders told their boys to stay in rural areas while they waited to return, hoping to protect village boys of the valley from being spoilt by town life. But it was the simple pastoral locals that needed protection from the valley's village boys, sharply tuned to spotting opportunity. Many of them married girls from well-off families, discovering quickly how highly prized their charming features were.

Sitting in his office, listening to the festive din outside, Aftab shook his head, thanking God he had trained before this deluge. He had hated it then but at least he had learnt something.

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Pakistan Takes Over

In the village of Manigam, age had not prevented Ali Sheikh from remaining astutely fleet-footed on the tightrope of politics. He had spent the mid-1980s juggling loyalties to Abdullah's rival successors. In cahoots with the local legislator, he had feathered his nest, particularly enjoying the private advantages of recommending young women for teachers' jobs. He lived in a double-storeyed brick house now, with a separate concrete kitchen adjacent, and an outhouse for cattle—on the same plot where the hovel he had been born in had stood. Indeed, men like him had done more than the Islamic winds from Iran and Afghanistan, or Pakistan's propaganda, to cement the alienation from India caused by New Delhi's political shenanigans.

So great was the alienation, and so inspiring the success of Rubaiya's abduction, that even Ali Sheikh's son—for whom Ali Sheikh had arranged a schoolteacher's job—joined when Kashmir flowed like an ocean tide to the grave of its patron saint on a wet winter day in late February 1990. It was an astounding sight, one that would have made Cecil B. DeMille weep. It drizzled, with patches of snow and lots of slush, but two-thirds of Manigam's ten thousand poured out, determined to go the 70 kilometres. Few of them got as far as Srinagar, for the roads were clogged, the bylanes packed. Trucks, buses, goods vans, cars and scooters, each bursting with people, headed the same way, inching forward with pedestrians packed between.

There was one slogan: '*Hum kya chate? Azadi* (What do we want? Freedom).' They all chanted, even little tots in the arms of mothers or fathers or grandmothers, proudly repeating it like a nursery rhyme. Perhaps that was the movement's weakness: it was too trite, not nearly thought through. Secession from India might have led to absorption into Pakistan but that possibility had figured

but vaguely in Kashmir's vaulting mind. The ebullient pictures of Eastern Europe that the Western media had vigorously pedalled loomed far more brightly.

Ali Sheikh's son was as excited as a five-year-old who has just been to the carnival, breathless, red-faced, quite unlike his usual obedient self. Ali Sheikh shouted at him, calling him mad. This insanity would not last, he said. They did not know India's power, its cunning tactics. This talk of freedom was childish and these JKLF fellows were the same rascals who had sold cinema tickets in the black market and peddled smuggled goods at street corners. What revolution could they bring, he demanded. What politics did they know? The young were not willing to listen to such talk that day. Tempers ran high and the family almost came to blows.

Ironically, Ali Sheikh was right precisely because the venality that had stood him in good stead to promote his and his family's interests at the expense of the common good, often through heartless exploitation, was not a personal quirk. Venality, opportunism and lack of common purpose were Kashmir's biggest weaknesses. They made it almost laughably easy for the Jamaat, and later the transnational mujahideen that Pakistan produced, to take over Kashmir's uprising. The Jamaat-e-Islami chief of the time, Hakim Ghulam Nabi, would recall on his deathbed that two of the HAJI foursome's fathers called him aside in the jail yard a few months after that march. Would he want to be *sadr*, president, or *wazir-e-azam*, prime minister, of an independent Kashmir, they had asked. They were drawing up the ministry, but the only slot they had definitely filled was *wazir-e-maal*, treasury minister.

In fact, Ali Sheikh was not the only one upset on the day of the march to the shrine. Turning tensely to his father, who was watching the throng with glee, Ishfaq remarked glumly that they were killing the movement, that the people would not come out again. Kashmir believed that the HAJI foursome had called them to that grave, but they had not. The boy who had been in a funk the day Guga had dug a cricket pitch had had the idea and the Green Crescent had backed it. Green Crescent was the support group Ishfaq's and a few other boys' fathers had launched. They would collect millions of rupees and dinars over the next few years from supporters of the struggle.

The boys' fathers may have been interested only in monetary benefit. Ali Shah Geelani sought political power. Hakim Ghulam Nabi had been taken to Kathmandu a few weeks earlier. He had no idea that his colleague Geelani was there too, meeting the same visitors—men from Islamabad, Muzaffarabad and London. Those men were there to chart the plan to present to Benazir and the Pakistan Army brass—for the ISI to take over the movement through Kashmir's Jamaat-e-Islami. The Jamaat chief rejected the proposal but Geelani took it on. And he would wrest control of the movement that Ishfaq had so dramatically launched.

Geelani had little respect for his chief Hakim Ghulam Nabi, the *amir*. By mid-1987, the Jamaat had been badly buffeted by the headstrong antagonism between Saduddin's successor and Geelani, and the cadre frightened by the way the 1987 elections had turned out. So, with no stomach for another battering, it had opted for its mildest face—utterly inadequate for the tough challenges ahead. Hakim Ghulam Nabi had backed the mirwaiz in 1947 before joining the Jamaat, drawn to puritan advocacy as a reaction to radical socialism rather than as a vehicle to political power. When the militancy began, he publicly decried violence once, at a meeting in Anantnag, but kept mum after men of his own cadre brandished guns at him. He would never until his death forget the panic on the face of the boy who rushed into his office one bitter winter's day in 1990 to say breathlessly that a man with a pistol was asking for the amir.

Before the explosion of public support, even Geelani had peered superciliously down his beaked nose at the militant struggle, refusing point-blank when Ishfaq and his band had asked for support. He had even criticized the gunmen publicly at a mosque near the medical institute. After Kathmandu, however, he moved as nimbly as a cat, fixing his sights on the group that had finally been named Hizb-ul Mujahideen. Several Jamaat men were in it. Nasir-ul Islam, who had been an Ahle-hadis preacher when he asked Aftab to burn a temple, was its founder-chief but Geelani had enough political experience to deal with that. He mobilized two of Jamaat's ranking leaders for the task: Ghulam Mohammed Safi to take charge of the training camp across and Ashraf Sehrai to displace Nasir.

Just then, the government chose to release from jail Mohammed

Yusuf Shah, Jamaat's erstwhile Srinagar district chief and the man for whom Ishfaq and his band had been election agents in 1987. So, instead of Sehrai, Geelani handed Yusuf the job of displacing Nasir—and then the JKLF. Geelani would acknowledge more than a decade later that, unhappy with the JKLF stance, he had examined Hizb's ideology before giving his colleague the task in March 1990.

For his grand new role as *sarparast-e-ala*, patron-in-chief, of the Hizb, the former Srinagar district chief decided to adopt the name Salahuddin, after the great general and benevolent king who had trounced marauding twelfth-century crusaders. Henceforth, Yusuf would be known as Syed Salahuddin—Syed to stress Central Asian origins. Nasir remained amir of the Hizb but he was now squeezed between the patron-in-chief and Ahsan Dar, who had named the outfit and then declared himself chief commander.

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Ishfaq did not know what Geelani and the ISI were up to, but he realized that things had gone awry for the JKLF. The movement he had begun with such zest was spinning out of control. Hilal had squatted with head bowed when Ishfaq had spoken to him earnestly of unity but had kept right on, turning his Students' Liberation Front into a rambunctious rival. Ishfaq had even sent word that Hilal could be their commander-in-chief but Hilal knew that he could never command Ishfaq—and that Kashmir acknowledged the HAJI foursome. Zargar too, the inner city lout, had skipped out of a window when Ishfaq had entered a house he was in—so eager were rival commanders to avoid Ishfaq.

Ishfaq had begun to smoke a lot over the past month. He lay awake at night, tossing as he agonized, pouring endless glasses of water into his parched mouth. He had some inkling by then of Geelani's involvement with the Hizb, which had emerged wraith-like as a competitor to the JKLF, but was not sure. The awfully gruesome torture and murder of a popular, strikingly handsome legislator called Mir Mustafa so revolted him, however, that he went to meet Geelani at a new house further down the bypass from Mir Mustafa's. Iqbal Gandroo, Ishfaq's shadow, watched as his leader beseeched Geelani to restrain those over whom he had influence. Their movement would

collapse, he said, if they turned their fire against each other. Soon after that, Ishfaq decided to cross the mountains again to sort things out with the ISI. He got a false identity card and planned to leave on 1 April 1990.

Two days before his planned departure, the Central Reserve Police Force killed half a dozen bystanders after one of Ishfaq's boys had fired at them in the inner city. Ishfaq could not rest that night. After eating a little before dawn—it was the third day of Ramzan—he set off with a small band to prowl in search of revenge. They had just got to the star-crossed area where Hamid had lunged for a police officer's pistol. As the boys emerged from a lane where the thoroughfare widened for a stretch, a one-ton paramilitary truck approached from the inner city. Ishfaq spotted a chance.

Ishfaq had not taken a gun that morning but had a grenade in the pocket of his phiran, a primitive one shaped like a bottle. Its cap had to be unscrewed and a string pulled to trigger it before it was lobbed. Ishfaq ordered his boys to cock their weapons and fire at the truck when he gave the word—all the while unscrewing the grenade cap with one hand inside his pocket. The boys fired accurately as the truck passed but the soldiers at the back of the truck fired back instantly, even as two of their comrades fell bleeding. A bunker at the bottom of the slope the truck was descending opened fire too. Just then, one of Ishfaq's boys yelled in panic. A police jeep they had not seen behind the truck was hurtling towards them.

As the cornered boys fled back into the lane, an explosion shook the ground. The bunker must have hurled a grenade, Ishfaq's comrades thought, but froze when they looked back. Ishfaq lay sprawled on the road, a huge hole in his phiran. Blood gushed from his side. The thread in the grenade had got yanked as he had broken into a sprint and the grenade had exploded in his pocket.

The hero of Kashmir's uprising was dead.

The field was clear for Geelani and other Islamists.

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Now that Pakistan's desire to stoke a rebellion in Kashmir that might finally bring it that prize was getting somewhere after so many fruitless decades, Islamabad's biggest fear was military retaliation by India.

Tension had been building since January 1990 when the Pakistan Army had conducted its biggest ever exercise, giving it the suitably Islamic title *Zarb-e-Momin*. A bit of a disaster, it had been called off three days early. In the war game, the Lahore corps commander had been cast as head of the putative Indian Army, but he had outflanked the three corps that had meant to surround and crush his force—or so India's ambassador in Islamabad, J.N. Dixit, reported. That amused New Delhi. What certainly did not amuse it was that Pakistan's troops remained in the exercise area, close to the border, after the war game.

India's prime minister, V.P. Singh, asked the Chinese ambassador for a meeting. As the ambassador was not in town, his deputy attended. The two countries had no cause for war, V.P. Singh told the Chinese affably. Why did they then deploy so many troops at their borders? Singh's left crutch in Parliament was close to Beijing and, after quick consultations, the envoy agreed to a mutual withdrawal of troops. The Indian soldiers relieved from the eastern border raced westward. And forces that had been ordered out of Sri Lanka, where Rajiv had sent them to quell Tamil rebels, were summoned two weeks ahead of schedule. Soon, India's army, the world's fourth biggest, was massed in front of Pakistan's. And India made it clear it would take conflict into the heart of its neighbour more vigorously than in 1965.

For weeks, India and Pakistan were on the brink of a third war. India at that stage had hardly any worthwhile intelligence on what was really happening in Kashmir, but it was convinced that Pakistan was behind the violence there. As tension rose to fever pitch, a series of meetings discussed scenarios. One fact hung like the sword of Damocles—the certain knowledge that Pakistan too had nuclear bombs.

Indeed, reports in Washington said that, during those weeks, Pakistan armed its air force with the bludgeon of Armageddon. So did India. The US, now the world's sole superpower, pressed the panic button. Robert Gates, the deputy national security adviser, was instructed to go straight on to South Asia from Moscow, where he was on a planned visit. In his meeting with Benazir, Gates told her that every war scenario the Pentagon could envisage gave India victory. When he met India's prime minister, V.P. Singh asked him: 'You don't expect me to just sit here and watch when their army is massed at my

border?' The prime minister, often uneasy in conversation, might have laughed in his customary series of sharp gasps but his eyes remained steady as he added: 'I can assure you that I do not intend to attack. But if their artillery moves forward, I will take it they are going to war. It is up to you to stop that.' Gates assured him it would not happen.

Pakistan would have been delighted to hear what Singh told Gates. As it struggled to keep pace with Kashmir's eruption after Rubaiya's abduction, Pakistan had no intention of raising the pitch to full-scale war. It only wanted to be sure that India was not going to attack in retaliation for what was going on in Kashmir.

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Murder Most Foul

An early spring sun washed the crisp air. Wajahat Habibullah, the special commissioner, and Veerana Aivalli, the deputy inspector general of police in charge of south Kashmir, decided to sit on the lawn outside their makeshift home. The valley had just a few weeks earlier been carved into three administrative units; these two were the first officers of their ranks to be posted and did not have proper offices yet. Both were poring over files when the sounds of agitation broke the still air. A crowd shouting slogans was striding down the road towards the gate. The armed policemen there raised their rifles but the commissioner told them to wait and sent a servant scurrying to find out what the hubbub was about.

A delegation was led to the officers by Shabir Shah's brother, one of the four who had been declared elected in 1987. This lot had not come to demand freedom. They wanted the government to prevent Pandits from leaving Kashmir. The exodus did not yet have the dimensions of those that had occurred twice before in Kashmiri history—under Bud Shah's father in the fourteenth century and the Afghans in the eighteenth—but a trickle had been flowing towards Jammu over the past few weeks as Pandit families from Srinagar and distant corners of the valley put whatever few belongings they could into any vehicle they could find and fled.

The commissioner settled more comfortably into his chair, arched an eyebrow behind a spectacle and raised both hands outwards. In lilting Awadhi Urdu polished by Cambridge, he said that it was an unfortunate trend but then, it was a free country. How could he stop anyone who wanted to move? After all, members of this delegation were using that same freedom to yell slogans from every mosque

throughout the night. Surely the slogans must have frightened the poor Pandits. If he found it unsettling, one could imagine what must be going through Hindu minds. He looked impeccably pained and his visitors nodded with intense empathy.

The two officers had come out into the garden, startled, the first night Anantnag's mosque loudspeakers had amplified a din, taking up a habit that had become ubiquitous in Srinagar. Freedom slogans melded with Islamic cries and the banging of metal utensils to conjure an auditory vision of apocalypse. The two officers had summoned the priests in charge of the town's various mosques the next morning. This must stop, the commissioner had said, primly earnest, while the deputy inspector general had stood by with a look of hooded menace.

It had stopped.

Habibullah and Aivalli had assimilated Kashmir's dissimulation over decades of working there. They knew the prankish streak in Kashmir that pushed insolently at the limits of tolerance. Most of the officers in charge at Srinagar, on the other hand, were groping in a fog. One of the advisers to the governor had headed Delhi Police but he and many of the other officers who had been rushed from the plains had little idea of what to make of Kashmir. Habibullah would later recall that that adviser had told him one day not to use his Gypsy jeep, pointing out that it was banned.

'Why have we banned Gypsies?' Habibullah had asked, nonplussed.

'We haven't. They have,' the adviser had replied.

As Kashmir's movement began to degenerate into a scramble for pecuniary advantage in the face of a government in shock, dealers of a rival motor company had apparently paid one of the hundred nebulous gangs to suppress sales of the popular model. Habibullah had carried on, not only using his Gypsy but flying his official flag too.

He ordered tea for his visitors and they had a long and agreeable chat. The local leaders who had come with Shabir's brother agreed that they should go around the district to reassure Pandits that they would guarantee their safety. Soon after they left, the commissioner telephoned Srinagar to tell Jagmohan. Pleased, the governor said he would announce it on television that night. He already planned to make an address. But the head of a Pandits' forum in Srinagar met Jagmohan later that afternoon and heatedly pressed for a very different

strategy—an urban response rather than a pastoral one. That night Jagmohan announced that camps would be set up for Pandits in Jammu, and those in the government's employ would be paid there.

Still, Shabir's brother and other leaders of Anantnag went to Pandit clusters to say that Muslims at large were with them. They must not leave. Beyond the idyll where Aftab's father had been born, they travelled to Verinag and Ahlan and Daksum and Chattergul, all picturesquely nestled in the southern tip of the valley. But their task was not easy. The Pandit leaders in Srinagar had had good reason to ask for refugee camps. Terror lived in every Pandit home, and it came not only from the blaring mosques. Kashmir had gorily been reliving its horrific history over several weeks.

Bansi, a twenty-two-year-old Chattergul shopkeeper met an end worse than a fiendish psychopath's fantasy. He was an amiable chap, the sort who did not mind weeding a Muslim's field for a wage—something that most Pandits would never dream of doing. One evening, four men drove up to Bansi's house asking for his brother. A rake, this brother had stirred up quite a scandal over his affair with a Muslim girl. Not finding the brother there, they pushed Bansi into their car and drove away. The next morning, his body was found next to a wooden bridge not far from Anantnag. It was barely recognizable. His genitals severed, Bansi had been tied and dragged behind a car for many stony kilometres. A note in his pocket named nine Pandits. They were all police informers, the note said, and would be next.

Bansi's remains were found on 28 April 1990. Thirty-three of Chattergul's thirty-six Pandit families migrated on the 29th.

Thakur Bhat, a leading Pandit of a neighbouring village, still insisted that Pandits must stay. On the 7th of May, his son's body was found outside the village. He had evidently been dragged for kilometres through the jungle. The young man, in his late twenties, had two children.

This was only the southern tip of Kashmir's open season on Pandits but the butchery was gruesome. A little to the north, a poet and avid student of Kashmiri culture, retired as a headmaster, was taken away with his twenty-seven-year-old son. The eyes of both were gouged out and their fingers, arms and legs broken before they were killed. A live girl was sawn in half at a sawmill near the highway.

The first Pandit to be killed, on 14 September 1989, had been an advocate who supported Vajpayee's party, now called the Bharatiya

Janata Party. Two of Ishfaq's boys had walked up to him as he emerged from his Srinagar home, pumped bullets into him and sauntered away. Then in the autumn, the Pandit judge who had decreed that Maqbool Butt be hanged visited the valley for some hearings at the high court. He had shifted from the valley for security and was generally extremely cautious on visits. But this time, he walked every day from his home—a stone's throw from Ishfaq's—to the high court less than a kilometre away.

Ishfaq deputed three boys to make the hit. They followed him on two successive days but failed to do it. Ishfaq's father overheard his son receive angry long distance calls the second night, pouring contempt on the group. So Ishfaq dispatched one of his closest chums on 4 November 1989. After three bullets had been pumped into the retired judge, the old man lay bleeding on the busy Hari Singh High Street, but not even Hindu shopkeepers dared go to his aid.

On 3 January 1990, an Intelligence Bureau officer was killed in Anantnag. Over the next six weeks, three other bureau officers, all Pandits, were killed in different parts of the valley. All of them had been targetted for the work they did or had done, Pandits told themselves. Then, in mid-February, the Pandit director of Srinagar's government-run television station was shot as he drove home. An urbane professional, he had been gregarious and popular. That is when Pandits across the valley panicked.

They had good reason. Their murder in cold blood had become frequent. Fourteen were killed in March—exactly the same number as Muslims killed that month, although there were thirty times more Muslims in the valley. Fifteen Pandits were killed in April, thirty-five in May, twenty-seven in June, nineteen in July and thirteen in August. The trend tapered the month JKLF's top leadership, including Yasin Malik, was jailed.

On a high since Rubaiya's abduction, Kashmir had rediscovered the primal euphoria of doing to competitor genes what a hormonally deranged schoolboy might do to insects. Islamist rhetoric was stretched to yield a gloss for ethnic cleansing, but it was not Guga's pan-Islamists, nor Shabir's Pakistanis or Geelani's puritans who slaughtered Pandits. It was JKLF nationalists. Bitta Karate, one of Ishfaq's most loyal comrades, later admitted that he alone had shot forty-seven Pandits, and would do it again for the same reason: that Ishfaq had ordered it. In fact, on several nights during an earlier winter, Ishfaq had made

Yasin sit beside him and sing, '*Is banau Pakistan, batav rustue batnaveu saan* (Pakistan will be made here, with no Pandits, only Pandit women)'. Ishfaq's father would recall that Ishfaq made Hamid and Javed prance round the carpet on those dreary evenings in his house as the boys lustily chanted the crass ditty.

Socio-economic resentment against Pandits had simmered among Kashmir's Muslims for a century and a half. It had been apparent in the rumblings in the Round Room in 1931 and in the riots of 1967. It is easy to blame the vicious brutality of 1990 on the Islamic radicalization of the 1980s but the fact that it was perpetrated by the JKLF indicates that Kashmir's dissatisfaction with its lot had reached a nadir. It went beyond politics or geopolitics. It had to do with frustrated aspirations and a sense that the future could only get worse, for it is only in such a milieu that societies crack up so violently. Amid chaos, the venality, guile and opportunism that is the bane of Kashmir's culture exacerbated the violence. It motivated several attacks designed to create particular vacancies in properties or jobs. Ultimately, morality is about discipline. It involves repressing the desire to take what one has not rightfully earned according to the rules of society.

Aspirations are a more important determinant of social stability—or instability—than wealth, or its rate of growth. In 1931, there was great deprivation but the frustrations of only the privileged few in a feudal hierarchy were in play. Land reforms and education generated such huge aspirations in Kashmir that the stalling of development after the 1960s caused resentment to gather like lava beneath the surface. Ordered cultures and puritanical religions repress an accumulation of such resentment, but cultures like Kashmir's bring it quickly to the surface. And just as lava explodes through fault lines in geological plates, economic and political frustrations find social fault lines.

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Colossal Bungling

The government was totally bewildered about how to deal with the violence against Pandits, or indeed Kashmir's uprising. That New Delhi did not even know how serious the situation was became more than evident when a visit to Srinagar by a delegation from Parliament quickly degenerated into farce. Friction between Jagmohan and the MPs began the moment they landed on a dull, overcast day in March 1990.

Pakistan was smoothly taking over through Geelani (though the Gates mission from the US had not yet come), and neither the MPs nor the prime minister, not even Jagmohan, knew what was really afoot. When the opposition raised questions in Parliament, the government sought to deflect the attack by dispatching an all-party delegation, including Rajiv Gandhi, leader of the Opposition, to Kashmir. They arrived in a mood to blame Jagmohan.

First, they kicked up a rumpus over Jagmohan not being at the airport to receive them. When he argued that protocol demanded that he receive only the prime minister, the MPs retorted that the deputy prime minister—Devi Lal of the backward castes brigade—was leading them. Then, at the governor's residence, the MPs rebelled against seating arrangements. Jagmohan had given himself the central seat, in accordance with protocol but not in keeping with the obsequious attitude some other governors adopted. The MPs argued hotly that the deputy prime minister should have pride of place, then the leader of the Opposition, and then the railway minister. George Fernandes, whom Farooq had so desperately called two months earlier, had come too. While this to-do was still on, Rajiv demanded to know why they had been brought to the governor's house at all. They had come to see Kashmir, not hear reports from the governor's staff.

So they were driven the short, safe distance from the governor's house to a concrete and glass convention centre on the lake, but that did not satisfy the MPs either. Rajiv complained that they were isolated from the city. He wanted to meet the people. Iftekhar Ansari—the politician from whose house the director general of police had set the Chota Bazar operation in motion—piped up to say he would take Rajiv to the city. When the adviser to the governor—the one who had advised Wajahat against using Gypsies—observed that that would not be safe, another round of fireworks erupted. Iftekhar's large frame shook as he yelled, 'We have given our lives for India and you don't trust me,' going on in that vein with gusto. The adviser shrank into silence.

Iftekhar was arguably Kashmir's most notable Shia. And although bloody strife had ceased since the 1970s, the small Shia minority had protected themselves in two ways for hundreds of years: spreading horror stories about sucking the blood of those who strayed into their ghettos, and keeping the powers-that-be happy. Iftekhar's party high command was in Srinagar that day and no governor or adviser was going to stop him from showing Rajiv Gandhi what an asset he was. In fact, when Jagmohan had lost his temper a little earlier and asked Rajiv if he should reveal what he used to be asked to do as governor when Rajiv was prime minister, Iftekhar had promptly leapt to high command's defence, grabbing the gubernatorial collar.

Chary of Rajiv's wish to go further, the officials finally hammered out a compromise: Kashmiris would be brought there. So some trade union men and a couple of other groups were quickly shooed into the hall on the mezzanine. The MPs expected to hear a litany of complaints against the administration, about unemployment, no electricity or development. But each group launched straight into arguments against Hari Singh's accession. The leader of the first began by pointing a finger at Rajiv. 'I am only talking to you,' he said, conjuring a look so nuanced it could become intimidating or engaging, depending on the reaction. 'And you believe me. I am only talking to you, Rajiv sahib, because you are Jawaharlal Nehru's grandson.' His eyes sparkled with the brilliance of his gambit. Wagging his finger, he went on, his voice swooping up in a lilting scale: 'Your grandfather promised us a plebiscite.'

Rajiv sat up till 3 a.m. Was the situation so bad, Iftekhar would remember the former prime minister asking that night. Was there no way to keep Kashmir with India? They could hear shrill cries for freedom resounding through the chill night air from boats sitting at the mouth of the lake, beside the island Abdullah had named Nehru Park.

The delegation returned morosely to Delhi the next day but one of them stayed back. During that afternoon of tantrums, George Fernandes had beckoned his personal assistant and told him to arrange two curfew passes. Tossing their bags into a ramshackle taxi, the two headed for the dilapidated railway guest house at the corner beyond Bakshi Stadium. It was full of dust, with holes in the sofas and broken glass on the tables. But there was a phone on the upper floor, and George went straight to it to call a series of National Conference workers, other politicians and trade unionists.

A former National Conference worker arrived that night with a couple of boys. One of them pulled a Kalashnikov from under his phiran, placed it on the table, sat down and put his feet up beside the gun. Then he told the minister how a squat National Conference leader had abused him when the 1987 elections had been rigged. George had several such meetings over the next couple of days. On the third day, the prime minister telephoned. An aircraft was on its way to fetch him. He still had work to do, George argued, but the prime minister insisted he return. George was driven straight from the airport to the prime minister's house, where he found many of the MPs who had been to Kashmir and several prominent Kashmiris based in Delhi.

The discussion went on late into the night. At one point, Rajiv said that George was the one person who could handle the situation and should be given charge. The prime minister agreed. V.P. Singh was already upset with Mufti and Jagmohan. He had wanted to sack the governor the day Jagmohan had dissolved the assembly without consulting the Union government, but Mufti along with Arun Nehru had dissuaded him over an entire day, arguing about the morale of the forces.

George was given charge of Kashmir affairs and two policies operated simultaneously over the next couple of months. Jagmohan told officers to get roads and water supply fixed while George hopped

around the place almost every weekend in a helicopter. Once, he insisted on visiting Doda, a town on the forested slopes beyond the southern rim of the valley where every fourth person is Kashmiri, even though the director general of police said it was too dangerous to land. Indeed, crackers were burst and utensils beaten while George was being driven up a steep track to one of those little bungalows the Raj had built for Very Important Persons touring the mofussil—the circuit house. Two engineers were there to supervise arrangements, the management of circuit houses being among the variegated responsibilities of government civil engineers. While they were serving him lunch, George asked where the noise was coming from. People have gathered in the Jamia mosque, sir, they replied deferentially. George asked them to go and ask if the people would meet him.

When the engineers returned to say the people were eager to meet, George left his food and went. They came bursting out, yelling, '*Hum kya chate? Azadi*' at the top of their lungs, milling around him, some embracing and kissing him. He was escorted into the mosque square while their leader continued to lead slogans on the mike—before switching to a speech in accusatory mode: 'You say India is a democracy but we have never seen a ballot paper. You say you have invested a trillion rupees here but we have never seen it. You say you are developing the state but we have no jobs.'

After three or four others had spoken in similar vein, George took the mike. He had seen defeat in two elections, where booths had been captured and ballot boxes stuffed with votes against him, he said in what he thought was Urdu. This was not their problem alone. It was his problem too. It was the nation's problem, he said passionately. The Congress had raped the ballot box. It had raped their ballot. It had raped his ballot. He had faced this since the very first elections.

George was in his element. The Congress' malfeasance was his favourite subject, bar none. The nation's money had gone into orchards here, he said, as it had gone into Italian tiles for swimming pools in south Delhi and into Swiss banks. They were on the same side, he told them, fighting the same battles. His audience gawked, foxed by this minister who was taking over their rebellion, deftly shifting the attack from the government to the Congress party.

The leader tried a different tack. He brought out a thick file with applications from 360 young men of the area, all with engineering

degrees, each wanting a government job. The boys would soon be over-age, he said, and George must please give them a leg up before that. George took the file but he had not had his fill of anti-Congress harangue. Fierily, he quibbled. They had mentioned that one trillion rupees had been spent in the state but he had access to government figures. Actually, only half of that, 500 billion rupees, had been spent, he said, determined to show how little Nehru and his family had done. An argument followed but George was insistent.

It was actually 999 billion rupees, the president of India told him gently when George recounted the story over breakfast one day. The president, who had been Union finance minister and defence minister, was shrewd and keen-eyed behind his mild manners. He often invited George for breakfast to ask what progress he was making on Kashmir. The president must have been intrigued by the focus on development and jobs, but of course Geroge's interactions had been beyond the enchanted bowl—the valley of Kashmir. The ethnic priority that had alienated other parts of the state almost as soon as the National Conference was formed had remained under successive governments, always headed by Kashmiris. Doda too had been left out.

The valley, its stomach better filled, was focussed not on jobs but the glories of independence. Among those with whom George talked over several weeks were JKLF's mentor, Dr Abdul Ahad Guru, and the mirwaiz. He struck a chord with both. Years later, he would describe Dr Guru as a true patriot. As for the mirwaiz, on a Friday in May, George listened for an hour over the telephone in Farooq's house while the priest launched into a diatribe on the Abdullahs' dynastic grip on power.

George was willing to listen. Indeed, by the end of that telephone conversation, both were in the mood for an agreement. Warming to his new friend, the mirwaiz told George with gusto that he would bring a hundred boys to Delhi for talks. George was going to Cairo the following weekend for a Socialist International meeting and asked the mirwaiz to bring them on the Sunday after.

When he got off the plane at Frankfurt en route to Cairo, the Indian consul walked up, looking grim.

George Fernandes had not been the only politician active in Kashmir in late March and early April 1990. Several leading figures on the other side of the political divide, many of whom had led the Muslim United Front a couple of years before, had tried to purchase current security and future power by elbowing into the militants' movement during those weeks. The rival leaders of Kashmir's Jamiat-e-Ahle-hadis found themselves the foci of the efforts of the Muslim United Front leaders—although neither had been part of this group in 1987. Abdul Rashid Tahiri, who had sparked pan-Islamic visions in Guga's young mind, had long battled the amir of the Jamiat-e-Ahle-hadis, a pleasant, plump man called Abdullah Tari, over whether their organization should back the insurrection. Tari had prevailed and the Ahle-hadis shoura had even revoked Shirazi's membership soon after that secret meeting with Aftab and the other tea stall boys at which the Islamic Students' League had been formed. Again, Tari's pacifist line had narrowly succeeded in early 1990, after three months of intense acrimony in the shoura.

In the spring of 1990, the two rival Ahle-hadis leaders chaired separate political meetings on the same day. The militant Tahiri presided over a packed hall on the top floor of a house not far from Guga's. The meeting began with an ebullient announcement by a trade union leader: his watch was already adjusted to Pakistan time. Yet, in the course of some long-winded speeches, someone suggested that they ought to include leading Pandits and Sikhs in their movement and the suggestion was endorsed by several of the leaders present. Some pretty major figures were there: G.M. Shah, Farooq's taciturn brother-in-law, along with Abbas Ansari, Lone and Shirazi, who had first chaired the Islamic Students' League. Jamaat's new district chief for Srinagar too sat quietly. Geelani must have sent him to keep an eye on this lot, for Geelani had that very day gathered the ones who mattered to him at a smaller meeting across the city. Yasin attended that one, and Professor. And Geelani got Tari to chair it. No doubt the short affable man was more comfortable with Geelani's Pakistani nationalism than with the pan-Islamist doctrines of Tahiri. Or perhaps Geelani simply wanted to rope Tari into the movement by appealing to his vanity. In any case, an announcement was made that evening: Tari had chaired a meeting at which a Tehrik-e-Hurriyat-e-Kashmir, the Kashmir Freedom Movement, had been set up.

Phones started ringing across the city as soon as this appeared in the next morning's papers and in a few hours Abbas Ansari, Lone and Qazi Nisar were at Farooq's brother-in-law's house. Worriedly, they pored over the newspaper report. There was talk of reviving the Muslim United Front as a counter but Abbas, quintessential diplomat, got everyone to sign a statement backing the new forum.

These nebulous political efforts got nowhere, however, for Jagmohan could not envisage a dialogue of the sort George had undertaken with 'anti-national leaders'. Jeeps full of security men swept up to the homes of several of these leaders one night and they were bundled away to the airport. By the time they got there, Geelani's nose was bleeding. His captors had abused and hit him, demanding to know what he had been doing in Kathmandu in January. They were bundled into an old Dakota and flown to Jammu and from there to Jodhpur, where they were stripped and placed in barracks with just a blanket each.

One significant figure in Kashmiri politics remained at large thereafter: Mirwaiz Farooq. Uneasy at the mercy of an unpredictable Kashmir, he had begun to wear a perpetual frown for the past four months, neither eating nor sleeping well. He had been particularly unnerved by the murder of the vice chancellor of Kashmir University, who had been a neighbour and friend. In fact, the vice chancellor had visited for dinner the night before Hilal had abducted him. Hilal was no doubt determined to outdo Ishfaq with another high-profile hostage drama but by then the rudderless government was not sure it wanted to negotiate. George had spoken to Hilal on the phone but that had only upset him. For the house Hilal was in was raided even as he was speaking—and, although he did not know how to swim, he had had to jump out of a window into an adjacent stream to escape. George's calls also upset Jagmohan's team, which was negotiating separately. Caught between so many crossed egos, the vice chancellor had been shot. The Pandit director of Srinagar's television station too had been a friend. The day he had been shot, the mirwaiz was sitting at dinner when his teenaged son, who had been watching television, ran in shouting for his father. When he broke the news, the mirwaiz stopped eating and sat ashen for a long time.

In February, he too had borne the brunt of militants' anger. A bunch of boys had roughed him up, pulling him out of his car on the

road not far from his home. It was a Friday and he had been on his way to the Jamia for afternoon prayers. His assailants, brandishing weapons, had been on their way to Hazratbal to hear their leaders speak and had demanded that the mirwaiz go with them. When he insisted that he had to go to the Jamia, they showered blows on his back and burnt his car. To them, his temperate statements against violence in the movement branded him a traitor.

As summer approached, the mirwaiz became more irritable. He snapped at his secretary, Syed ur Rehman Shams, to bring pen and paper one morning in early May. Over the next three days, he laboured over a letter, redrafting it several times. Finally, he told his secretary to make three copies. One was to be addressed to Pakistan's prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, the second to President Ghulam Ishaq Khan and the third to the prime minister of Azad Kashmir, Sardar Abdul Qayoom Khan. Pained and passionate, the letter was half-appeal, half-protest. Killing innocent persons must stop, he wrote, asking how he would answer God on Judgement Day for these deaths.

He instructed Shams to take the letters to Delhi and hand them to Riaz Khokkar, Pakistan's high commissioner. Sofi Muslim, an old associate of the mirwaiz, went with the young secretary. At the mirwaiz's home, the telephone continued to buzz through the next fortnight. Apart from promising George he would bring a hundred boys to Delhi for talks, the mirwaiz spoke to Mufti and Jagmohan, alluding to those who had been arrested the previous month and hinting that he too might be placed in custody. He even declared in the course of a sermon at the Jamia that his life was in danger.

The 21st of May began silently. One of the 140-odd militant gangs that had sprung up by then had demanded 'civil curfew' and fear of their guns was at that stage far stronger than fear of the state. The mirwaiz spent the morning drafting a statement. It must say that Kashmir was disputed, he told his secretary, and the issue should be settled either in line with the 1948 United Nations resolutions or through tripartite talks between India, Pakistan and representatives of the Kashmiri people. It was the second mechanism he was putting into play actually, paving the way for the talks he planned to lead in New Delhi the next weekend.

While they were at it, the old gardener who worked gratis shuffled in to say some men wanted to meet him. Engrossed in the draft, the priest did not even look up. The old man stood respectfully, his hands clasped below his waist for a few minutes before he summoned up the courage to repeat his message. Looking up testily, the mirwaiz asked who had turned up in the middle of a civil curfew. They had come on foot and said they had some urgent work, the old gardener replied reverently. The priest said they could wait in the office and went back to the papers in front of him. The office was in a small double-storeyed brick building at the end of the drive. There the men were shown to sofas in a carpeted anteroom.

When the statement was ready, the mirwaiz told his secretary to dictate it over the telephone to his list of correspondents. He normally began with Mark Tully of the BBC and went on to IRNA, the Iranian news agency, the senior Pakistani correspondent in New Delhi and then the major Indian news agencies. Just as he was snapping these instructions, still frowning, a middle-aged woman arrived, also asking to see him. She too was led to the waiting room as the priest went into his office.

He summoned her first. After a few minutes, he called his secretary to instruct him that her son's school fees at the Islamia School, which his family had run for decades, should be waived.

Then the three men were shown in.

In the anteroom, his secretary went back to dictating the statement over the telephone. After a while, he heard muffled gunshots. Thinking the sounds had come from the street, he went on. Just then, the three men scrambled out, one of them holding a revolver. The secretary stared transfixed while the old gardener tried desperately to grapple with one of them as they ran towards the gate, but he was no match for them. When the secretary finally found his wits and went into the office, Mirwaiz Farooq was prone on the carpet, blood oozing from his forehead.

The news spread like wildfire as soon as a car screeched into the medical institute and the mirwaiz was rushed in on a stretcher red with his blood. Scores of 'goats' on the hospital staff burst wildly into

the operation theatre to see the unthinkable. Others began to shout curses and break windowpanes on the ground floor as word seeped out that he was dead. Someone said it was the work of the Shiv Sena and slogans were yelled against that Hindu party. More panes shattered.

Soon, thousands thronged the hospital premises and the road outside. A procession, a frenzied mob, formed as his body was carried out onto the road and turned towards the mirwaiz's traditional home, where he had once guffawed in a friendly hamam. Telephone lines had been buzzing, the wireless network crackling, for an hour. R.K. Takkar, the new chief secretary, was an old Kashmir hand. He urged Jagmohan to visit the mirwaiz's home. After a while, he called again to repeat the advice and recommend that offices be closed in mourning, but Jagmohan replied with an edge that the mirwaiz had made so many anti-India statements. Persistent, the officer suggested that he might at least send a bouquet. Jagmohan did not.

Several senior officials then urged Jagmohan to withdraw security forces from the inner city, or at least order them to lie low. Anger against the killers should have free play, they argued. The superintendent of police in charge of the area chimed into that chorus of pleas in impassioned descant, screaming frenziedly on the wireless that he would handle the situation but Union security forces must be removed.

Jagmohan was on a different wavelength. The wireless receiver in his car was tuned to another frequency. He had decided to drive through the city to gauge the public mood. His first instinct had been curfew. Under pressure from his officials, he had withdrawn that order but kept changing his mind. Now, the director general of police, sitting in the police control room, could not reach him and nobody knew his latest decision. The inspector general of police, a genteel soul with the demeanour of a cow, was on the road outside the hospital but readily agreed when the senior superintendent of police suggested as the procession started moving that they visit the crime scene.

The Border Security Force was deployed in bunkers in the outer parts of the city. Mufti had forced the most lethally competent officer who had dealt with Kashmir to take charge of that force in the state—with the additional mandate of gathering intelligence. A man with the bearing of a Pharaoh, he spoke fluent Kashmiri and was cunning enough to turn into his own any boys Pakistan might send to hijack an Indian aircraft. His name was Ashok Patel.

Patel's men were well briefed that day. They stood by respectfully as the raucous procession passed, ignoring the angry slogans against India and the Shiv Sena. One picket even saluted the bier. As the road opened out into a double carriageway at the stretch where Hamid had been felled and Ishfaq killed, the crowd swelled, as thousands more 'goats' burst out of adjacent Lal Bazar. The Central Reserve Police Force manned bunkers from that point on. They thought curfew was in force and had heard nothing of an assassination. As the front of the crowd reached the far end of the half-kilometre stretch, the men in the bunker perched on the Islamia College wall, which ran alongside, panicked. A multitude seemed to be welling endlessly before them.

They opened fire from their turret. For interminable minutes, they fired, directly at the crowd in front. The bier had just reached the centre of that awful stretch, right in front of the raised bunker, and the rain of bullets hit the pallbearers. They fell in a welter of blood and the body tumbled to the road, peppered with more bullets.

On the day following the *chahrum* ceremonies, performed four days after a death, Jagmohan was sacked.

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Dissipation

Kashmir slipped off the headlines quite soon after the mirwaiz's assassination, for in July 1990 India went into paroxysms over a battle Kashmir had been through in the 1930s—whether merit or reservation should determine government jobs—a battle that had culminated, more than half a century on, in vicious killings and mass migration from Kashmir.

In New Delhi, it led to the Bharatiya Janata Party pushing Vajpayee to the margin as it led a march of religious zeal that united the privileged castes like a phalanx against the resurgence of neo-privileged cowherds and the aspiring descendants of cobblers. The government soon collapsed and India lurched through turmoil and near-bankruptcy during 1991. The new government that emerged after fresh elections was led by a wise strategist called Narasimha Rao. He decided to focus first on the economy and on Punjab, which was also wracked by insurgency.

The Western media was meanwhile focussed on Kuwait and Iraq, the first Gulf War. So for a couple of years, Kashmir was left largely to the man who replaced Jagmohan. Gary Saxena had headed India's external intelligence and, though Saxena would deny it, Aftab's ISI trainers muttered darkly that he had operated undercover as an imam in East Pakistan before the 1971 war. A scholar of Persian and Arabic, he was an urbane, soft-spoken man—among the last recruits to the Indian police cadre of mainly British officers that had enforced the Raj. Ashok Patel and the director general of police, the one who had been in the Intelligence Bureau, knit well with Saxena and, though the army was asked to assist operations, intelligence was the backbone of their strategy.

By May 1990, Patel already had a good grip on information, although he missed a major breakthrough in early April when Yasin

took Ishfaq's place as JKLF chief commander. Yasin happened to be there when Patel's men raided a house that senior militants often used. The vice chancellor had recently been abducted and the soldiers were looking for Hilal Beg, who was also due to come there. Presuming they were there for him, Yasin leapt from a third floor window, got entangled in some electric wires and landed below, unconscious and severely injured. Not recognizing the tall thin fellow, the raiding posse left him in hospital before taking the house owner to Patel. By the time, while questioning him, Patel discovered the identity of the one who had jumped, hospital staff had made sure Yasin disappeared.

Yasin spent the next couple of months recuperating at Brain, a village that would be Saint-Tropez if the Dal were the Mediterranean. A couple of boys slipped across the lake almost every day, nestling comfortably in a shikara, to the quadrangle of kiosks across the road from the cascading Mughal garden. There, among the now deserted stalls of curios, cheap leather jackets and handbags, they met their chief commander around a tin trestle table, for Yasin would be driven there from Brain for updates and the ice creams he craved. The fall on those power cables had left him partially paralysed, his face skewed, his motor functions impaired—in fact, his companions were often waved past security pickets along that short route when they explained to the soldiers that he was deranged.

Hamid stayed with him almost constantly at Brain while Nanhaji, the boy whom Javed had left at the terminus the day Rubaiya had been abducted, ran the orphaned outfit. It was not a tough task. Boys roamed the inner city with élan in those days, guns slung carelessly over their shoulders. Its warren of lanes was one sprawling hideout, all its residents an early warning system. 'Curfew was nonsense for us,' Babar Badr later remarked of that time. But apart from brashly strutting around, their tactics remained lob-and-run. Indeed, few Kashmiri boys could resist having fun and even the commanders spent little time planning strategy. Dressed in a torn phiran, Yasin had once hobbled over to a bus full of security men, pretending to beg for alms.

Some militant commanders would later say they thought Pakistan was going to enter the arena directly, others that they thought the ISI had planned something. Aftab would add that they dared not ask senior ISI officers their plans for fear of being labelled Indian agents. So indecision and narcissism turned the movement's brash heroes into

sitting ducks on Ashok Patel's sharpening radar. He was focussed particularly on the JKLF, the name most often on Kashmir's lips. One morning in early August 1990, the Border Security Force swooped into what Yasin, who had by now recovered, thought was a safe house—not far from Patel's headquarters. Yasin and Hamid had been discussing plans with a dozen boys when they were arrested there.

Kashmir's independence movement was effectively over that day but the collapse of the JKLF only fuelled the ISI's plans. Less than a fortnight after those arrests—on President Zia's second death anniversary, in fact—Salahuddin convened a meeting of militant commanders in an orchard at Nagbal, halfway from Srinagar to Manigam. The men there represented the spectrum of militancy—Babar Badr, the upper crust pro-Pakistan commander, Mushtaq Zargar, the inner city pro-Pakistani, and Guga, the pan-Islamist. Also present were Altaf Qadri of the pro-independence JKLF and Shirazi, the cleric, who had by this time joined Azam's mainly defunct group, also pro-independence. Salahuddin spoke at that meeting about the need for unity. So many groups, each with a separate command structure but a common field of operation, had caused strife. Zargar in particular was upset with the JKLF, which had refused to add the release of one of his boys to the list of demands when Rubaiya had been abducted.

Not only were there too many groups, many of them were riven within by ego clashes. A few months after Hilal had split the JKLF, Al Umar too had split. Its chief, Mushtaq Zargar, had sent a letter to his deputy, Shabir Zargar, with the first batch of trainees he sent from Muzaffarabad. The letter asked Shabir to give pride of place to a bright young man who was part of the group. Suspecting—correctly—that the bright young man was to take his place, the deputy ignored the letter. That led to a fracas when the chief returned and, after much wrangling, a split. The new group took a share of the group's weapons.

In this context, Salahuddin was naturally heard with respect when he spoke at Nagbal of unity. But his real purpose was suzerainty. To begin with, he wanted to take over the Hizb, of which he was still only the patron-in-chief. Sitting beside him in that orchard were the instruments he had chosen for that takeover: Imran Rahi, the man Nasir-ul Islam had taken with him for training and then appointed deputy chief commander of the Hizb, and Abdul Majid Dar. At the time, Majid led a small group—one that the founder of the People's League, Fazl-ul Haq Qureshi, had formed the previous autumn.

Salahuddin was an astute politician. He moved step by step over the next few months, concentrating first on the Hizb chief commander, the insecure Ahsan Dar. Telling him that the Jamaat backed him against Nasir's interference, he got him to declare that Hizb was the *askari baazu*, sword arm, of the Jamaat. Nasir, who had established the group and was still amir, belonged to the rival puritan group, Ahle-hadis. Irate, he issued a press note appointing Imran Rahi in Ahsan's place, but Salahuddin kept Imran with him in Sopore. Imran was a pleasant man with the ambition of a mule and Salahuddin, not leaving his side for several days, spoke at length of sacrificing personal ambition for the greater good and of the awful consequences of a split. After waiting for Imran in Srinagar for a few weeks, Nasir finally gave up and in the autumn of 1990 left Hizb to establish a new force, Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen. The Green Army—which the mirwaiz's assassin, Abdullah Bangroo, had already set up as a sort of wing within the Hizb—went with him.

Salahuddin then moved to the second stage of his takeover. He merged Majid Dar's group into the Hizb at the beginning of 1991. He trusted Majid, who had once worked on Geelani's staff in Sopore, and appointed him military adviser. Then Salahuddin crossed the Line of Control and in spring dispatched Jamaat-e-Islami loyalists Ashraf Dar, Maqbool Ilahi and Wahid Sheikh from there as district commanders. Now it was Ahsan Dar's turn to chafe. He tried to stop those transfers but his letter to his cousin Ali Mohammed Dar—whom he had placed in charge of the Muzaffarabad camp—that they should not be sent cut no ice with Salahuddin. Instructions were soon issued to Hizb area commanders that government informers—often just a label for anyone a local commander wanted to eliminate—must not be killed without clearance from the Jamaat district chief. As Jamaat's control over Hizb increased inexorably, Ahsan Dar too left in the autumn of 1991.

So, by the end of 1991, Geelani's men controlled the Hizb. Nothing had come of the unity across groups that Salahuddin had spoken of in the Nagbal orchard and Hizb now turned its fire on other groups as it consolidated exclusive hold on pockets, mainly in rural areas.

When, in early 1992, a Jamaat member was shot in Khor village near Pattan, Hizb bosses suspected the JKLF, and began to kill JKLF boys across the valley.

The biggest inter-group battle had already taken place, not far from Manigam, in the Jamaat stronghold at Lar village. Once a stop on the way to the desolate highlands of Gilgit and the markets of central Asia beyond, the ceasefire line had turned Lar into a nowhere land. When Hizb men snatched the weapon of an Al Umar boy passing through Lar, a gangster known as Mama Sadpuri abducted the Jamaat's district chief. Sadpuri, the best-known outlaw of the ravine beyond Manigam, had patronized Zargar in the 1980s and was by this time affiliated to Zargar's group, Al Umar.

The abduction set the stage for Zargar and Salahuddin to meet in Wazapora and agree to an exchange of the prisoner for the snatched gun. But that did not end the war. A month later, Hizb struck in revenge. Scores of Hizb boys surrounded Sadpuri as he was walking through the city and abducted him to Lar. There, they tortured him in Salahuddin's presence, burning him between his toes, using a gun's cleaning rod that had been heated till it glowed red, and branding his stomach and back with the letters 'HM'. The district chief was their prophet, Sadpuri would later swear the Hizb men had said that night.

Zargar reacted on his feet, sending out his boys to lock up every Jamaat man they could find in the city. It took three days for the boom of gunfire to cease and the prisoners to be exchanged. Zargar won that battle but, like most Kashmiri groups, his Al Umar was broken with his arrest in the spring of 1992. Inordinately suspicious, he had not told any colleague where the weapons or money were stored.

As Patel and the army picked up such key commanders, Hizb quietly expanded. It was still largely in the rural areas and barely showed up on the forces' radar. Kashmir by and large continued to revile the Jamaat—and the pro-Jamaat legacy of Zia that its boys had found in Pakistan—but could do little but watch in horror as the Jamaat slowly but surely took control. In moral terms, Kashmir's movement had already gone to pieces. It had erupted more fierily than in 1931 but more chaotically too. Neither were establishmentarian pirs subtly guiding this movement, nor Shavian idealists leading it. So Kashmir went through the traumas of guerrilla carnage pulled in various directions by diverse commanders, each aspiring to fulfil a blinkered personal ambition.

While the protection that administrative systems afford to social hierarchies had all but disappeared, the upward mobility that land reforms had unleashed climaxed chaotically. One upper class doctor whose daughter had fallen in love with his servant faced the latter asking for marriage, armed with a gun and the halo of a mujahid. Thinking fast, the doctor asked for a few days to arrange a suitable wedding feast, then bundled the girl out of Kashmir and migrated to Malaysia with his entire family a couple of days after. Many of Kashmir's militant boys made a habit of staying nights at well-off homes that had one or more attractive girls. At times, the men of the home were dispatched to keep watch outside after dinner while a girl was asked to bring tea or milk for the group's leader. Marriages were sometimes forced, often held to for no more than a few days.

Kashmir would not speak of the short-term or lasting marriages that did take place, for the chaos of the times left in shreds the sense of superiority that had always so animated it. It did disparage its militants, though—some as *batha mujahid* (rice holy warriors), for there were those who were only in it for the free meals that could be demanded in any house, others as *soyat* (lantern wick), the fellows who hung around trained gunmen, basking in reflected glory. And some were called *tsicha* (swab), the ones who fetched and carried or pasted posters on the orders of militants.

Whether tsicha or soyat, city militants thought of themselves as film heroes—and dressed the part. Young men visiting shrines such as Hazratbal learnt not to go wearing branded sneakers, for gunmen hanging around often demanded that the shoes be donated to 'the cause'. Others were relieved of their jackets. The gunmen particularly enjoyed preening in jackets with a huge US eagle printed on the back and ankle-high boots with warm lining, the sort that could be bought in Kathmandu. The other fashion favourite was a black phiran or salwar-kameez with an Afghan turban. These eclectic fashions reflected the ambivalence—nay, the dichotomy—in Kashmir's purpose.

This time, its dichotomy had a socio-economic pattern, however, one that the map of militant bases across Kashmir elucidated. More or less all the areas that had benefitted from land reforms, education

and Bakshi's development wanted no part of Pakistan. So, although the JKLF was no more than a shell of its former self after Ishfaq's death, its image remained larger than life in uptown Srinagar and most of rural Kashmir. Angrily frustrated at the way Kashmir's early rapid growth had floundered after Bakshi, these areas wanted to break away from both India and Pakistan—their ambivalence limited only to the agenda for the construction of Utopia, its leadership, ideology and territorial extent (all they knew was their valley was not enough, they had to rule over others).

The downtown Srinagar bastion of the mirwaiz, inhabited largely by artisans whose lives had not changed radically, became home to most of the pro-Pakistan groups in the early phase. So while the JKLF boys were concentrated in Wantpora just beyond downtown—adjacent to the stretch where Hamid had been shot and Ishfaq killed—Zargar's Al Umar and Babar's Muslim Janbaz Force were based in the warren of Wazapora's lanes, in the heart of downtown. (To protect itself from its parent outfit, Hilal's Students' Liberation Front cosied up to the pro-Pakistan groups in Wazapora.)

Hizb's early bases were in Pattan and Budgam, the homes of its leaders, but by the time the Jamaat had taken over, Sopore had become its bastion. And as the army and Border Security Force took control of Srinagar through the winter of 1990–91, other pro-Pakistan groups too shifted base to Sopore. That pocket where land reforms had been rolled back so that apples could turn it into Little London became the bedrock of pro-Pakistan militancy and of puritanism. Like Shopian, that other home of guns and apples, it remained a Jamaat-e-Islami stronghold.

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Guerrilla Hero

In late 1990, Aftab was soaring on the wings of fame—owing, ironically, to a failed attempt to return across the Line of Control. For a couple of months after he had got Colonel Asad's conditional clearance, he rounded up all the trained Hizbullah boys and then airily agreed when other commanders asked him to take some of their boys too. Hiring five of the best Gujjar guides, the band of seventy-five boys set out in late summer. Trekking through the night, they crossed a little ravine before climbing steeply to a point called Dat Top on the Line of Control. Since it was just an hour before dawn by then, they decided to descend at first light and lay down for an hour. The entire lot fell asleep, however, and the biggest nightmare of Aftab's life began when he was woken a few hours later.

The hand insistently shaking his shoulder transmitted fear. At first, he groaned and turned away, his head throbbing dully, but then his eyes opened to find the sun blazing overhead. Immediately realizing the danger they were in on that ridge-top, he shushed sharply as one of the waking boys loudly asked what had happened. Cursing under his breath, he looked around for the guides. They were sleeping too, all five of them. Aftab dared not berate them, for the group would be dead in these forests without them. Responsibility weighed heavy. He would be finished as a commander if he failed to lead a successful crossing that day. The boys were already looking at him, questioning, uneasy. So he huddled with the guides, asking if it would be safest to stay put till evening. No, they said. They were too exposed here on the ridge. They had to risk moving on.

Aftab gave instructions, his voice soft but firm, and the boys picked up their bags and equipment. A boy whose home was near Hazratbal offered to say a prayer. They gathered round him, eyes clenched, palms

raised. His prayer was the most moving Aftab had ever heard. His voice intense, he asked that God take each of them to Himself, scattering them as martyrs for the greater glory of the true religion, each no more than the specks of dust He had made them from. Some of them ran knuckles over their eyes, brushing away tears after the chorus of 'Ameen'.

They began to move. The guides strung themselves out among them, two leading the way. As they walked fast, sounds of breaking twigs and falling stones ran through the forest. The boy who had prayed suddenly slumped, gasping, 'La Allah'. Blood gushed from his chest, seared by a burst of fire that had cut through the thick foliage. Aftab, who was near him, dropped to his knees and crooked his head in his arm. In that instant, he proved his mettle, taking command with a sharp hiss: 'Don't fire. Get down.' The brief burst had ended and he thought he should assess his enemy before revealing his strength. Quietly unscrewing the telescope from a rocket launcher, he slipped it to one of his boys, saying, 'Go, see who fired,' his whisper so casual he might have been asking for tea. Panic, he knew, was the last thing they needed.

Creeping under thick bushes to the top of a steep slope, the boy spotted an army patrol crawling slowly up behind the trees some distance to the right. By the time he returned, the officer had announced over a loudspeaker that they were surrounded and must surrender. Aftab spoke quietly to his crouching boys: 'There is only one option. We must fight back. But we must be disciplined and move only when I order. Or we will all die.'

Then he quietly had all three rocket launchers that the group was carrying assembled. And told one of the guides to run as fast as he could to the Pakistani major in charge on the other side and ask for covering fire. He had befriended the major while waiting to start on the previous day and felt a warm confidence about him. After the guide scurried away, Aftab told his boys to tie the other four. If they fled while they battled, the group would be lost. Then he signalled for all three rockets to be fired together, directly towards the thick foliage behind which his scout had seen soldiers crawling.

The Pakistani picket soon began to fire and for hours the artillery sounded like an unending roll of thunder. That pinned the Indian soldiers where they were and they exchanged a volley of deafening

fire, filling the thick forest with smoke, but got no closer. Still, death hovered through the day. A message intercepted by the Pakistanis reported that the first three rockets had killed eighteen soldiers, but the rest battled with a vengeance.

After several hours, Aftab signalled his boys to slip quietly back through the forest. They had brought lots of food for the journey—rotis, pickles, sweets, chewing gum—but dropped it all there, taking only arms and ammunition back.

They found a cave and, though they were exposed from the slope beyond the gully below, Aftab decided they should wait there till dark. They opened the one bottle of pickle they had brought. That kept hunger at bay but made them thirstier than they already were. They had had no water since the previous night and fear and thirst spun the rest of that day into eternity. They finally found water in a little stream at the bottom of a ravine they crossed at night. But since the guides said the ravine was patrolled, they sloshed up the water as they skipped through, not daring to stop.

They marched through the night behind the guides, stumbling with fatigue. When, early next morning, they saw a Pakistani picket in the distance, relief surged through them like a drug. They had just been talking of taking cover until the evening, aching brokenly at the thought of another day without food or water. But the sight of the picket drove fatigue and fear away. Their plodding turned to a brisk walk and some of them burst into laughter, releasing tension, as they spotted a boy standing near the picket. One of the youngest among them, he had pelted back in the heat of the previous day's battle. Aftab squeezed him in a tight embrace, unable to smile. The boy was a friend of his younger brother's.

The major who had saved their lives with artillery cover made Aftab sit and washed his feet with warm water. He then got halwa and rotis cooked for the boys, praising their courage to the skies. A colonel and a major of the ISI were waiting to embrace Aftab on the road as they entered Muzaffarabad. The eighteen casualties they had inflicted had been the second biggest setback to Indian operations at the Line of Control.

Pakistani newspapers screamed headlines about it and some of them mentioned Aftab's name. He walked on air for weeks, swaggering around the base camp and the various group's offices with a huge

grin, relating the battle in gory detail whenever it was mentioned at the dinners to which migrant Kashmiri families invited him. Hizbullah was now properly recognized and given funds through the ISI's Refugee Management Committee. Along with another small group, Aftab rented an office in Muzaffarabad. He had arrived.

Still on a high, he was walking at the edge of Muzaffarabad one day when he spotted the diminutive revolutionary Azam Inquilabi staggering towards him. On the verge of collapse, Azam looked as bedraggled as he must have when he had first got across in 1968. Aftab ran to him, shouting '*Bab sahib! Bab sahib!*'—the honorific the boys at the tea stall had used for him.

Azam had been hiding in the forests not far from Manigam when the mirwaiz had been shot. The news had mortified him, and not only because he had been born a 'goat'. The mirwaiz had sent him a cryptic message just a few days earlier: '*Mere liye kya hukum hai?*' Why would the mirwaiz be asking for his orders, he had wondered in the forest but, obliquity being the soul of courtesy in these parts, that had been the priest's way of inviting Azam to get in touch as he prepared to lead talks with George Fernandes. Already dismayed at the way the movement had scattered since he had crossed the Line of Control with Ishfaq's band in August 1988, Azam had decided after the mirwaiz's assassination that it was time to go back across and find out where he stood.

Having bumped into Aftab as he reached Muzaffarabad, he kept in touch. Aftab was delighted when he dropped in one day. He dragged Azam around his new office with the excitement of a little boy, pointing out each piece of new furniture he had selected. He was very proud. After Aftab ordered a boy to bring 'special tea' for them, Azam began earnestly to discuss the movement. It was getting scattered, he said, and suggested that Aftab invite a few commanders over to discuss coordination.

Delighted at the chance to show off his new office, Aftab issued invitations. Attendance was impressive: Raja Muzaffar, a senior JKLF leader, Ashraf Saraf, a leading Jamaat functionary who had recently arrived in Muzaffarabad, Abdul Salam Rather of Babar's outfit and Altaf Qureshi of Hilal's. They responded well to Azam's talk and, by the end of the meeting, Azam had been acclaimed chairman of a United Jihad Council. Aftab slid smoothly into the role of coordinator.

The new council unnerved the ISI, for it threatened to trip up Geelani's quietly unfolding plans to take over Kashmir's movement on behalf of Pakistan. Three ISI officers turned up at Azam's office a few days later, carrying a draft constitution which they wanted the new council to adopt. Azam stared at the laboriously handwritten pages, thinking they looked as if a schoolboy had copied them. The nub of it was that the movement's objective was Kashmir's merger with Pakistan.

Azam responded that not every group shared this objective. The JKLF at least was intent on independence. An argument ensued and the officers left in a huff. A couple of days later, a newspaper report announced that a United Jihad Council had been formed to lead the Kashmir movement. The chairman, it stated, was the Hizb camp commander, Ali Mohammed Dar.

The brigadier who had led the officers had probably been fooled by appearances, for Azam's bespectacled earnestness did not reflect the grit that had for twenty-three years survived ridicule, torture and frustration. Azam bustled to Rawalpindi and called a press conference about what had happened and to invite Pakistan's 'high officials' to talk to him. If Pakistan's leaders did not respond within a month, he announced, the Kashmiri boys would go back across the Line of Control.

A month later, there was no response.

Azam's anger had been rising. He liked to think of himself as a father figure to the JKLF boys and the stepmotherly treatment they were getting was painful to watch. A group of Hizb boys would carry a weapon each to Kashmir, sophisticated heavy weapons too sometimes, but a dozen JKLF boys would be handed two or three automatics or pistols to share. Four thousand of them were packed into a camp meant for half as many and trucks ferrying supplies to the camps sometimes skipped theirs. Javed Mir, who was in Muzaffarabad that winter, would later recall that there were days when they begged on the streets for money to buy food.

So Azam went ahead with the threatened march. Several thousand boys streamed down the road along the bank of the Jhelum one March day in 1991. Amanullah Khan, the JKLF founder, was with him as diminutive Azam led the boys towards Garhi Dupatta, from where they would turn towards the Line of Control. Before they got to Garhi, however, a string of jeeps and cars caught up and a couple of ministers from the Azad Kashmir government got off to plead with them not

to go further. Like a petulant lover, Azam told them sarcastically that they had come very early. He kept marching. The ministers cajoled, telling him Nawaz Sharif—who had recently become prime minister—wanted to meet him. Finally, they persuaded Amanullah and Azam to at least ride in their cars up to Garhi. There, they gathered the boys in a school compound and asked them what they wanted to do. The restive boys were in a mood to carry on but then Tariq Kashmiri, a confident young boy with a voice like Abdullah's, took the mike. They should return to Muzaffarabad, he urged, and give the Pakistani leaders another chance. If they were not satisfied, he would himself lead the next march. (The change of plan was fortunate for Azam and his followers, for so sure was India that the march was a Pakistani conspiracy that troops at the Line of Control had been ordered to fire if Azam and his band approached.)

Sardar Qayoom, prime minister of Azad Kashmir, accompanied Azam and senior JKLF leaders to meet Prime Minister Sharif. They were also taken to meet the ISI chief and the deputy chief of army staff, Generals Durrani and Imranullah. They all assured Azam the pro-independence groups too would be well treated. But nothing changed.

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Aftab had not been part of Azam's march. He was keeping the ISI happy that winter while he worked out the safest route to get back to the thick of action. He had discovered that the ISI had a thriving base in Kathmandu and so decided to return to Kashmir that way. He paid an agent 5,000 rupees from the funds he had been given to run Hizbullah's training. That got him a Pakistani passport and a Nepalese visa. He flew to Kathmandu and took a bus and then changed a couple of trains to reach Jammu.

There, he went straight to the home of his father's best friend, a Pandit retired from the police. He was received warmly, for he pretended he had come from Srinagar. His hosts had heard of his involvement in the movement but he denied it, announcing airily that his students' union work at the university had been misconstrued. Oblivious entirely to the danger he had put his hosts in, he laughed off the vermilion mark he applied to his forehead whenever he went out—so that he might pass more easily for a Pandit. Aftab's father rushed to Jammu

when Aftab telephoned, and made a trip to the shrine next to the airport to give thanks for his son's safe return. The family had grieved briefly for him, for some of the Hizbullah boys who had gone ahead of the group that battled on the Line of Control had reported to Guga that Aftab's party had been slaughtered on the heights.

His Pandit hosts went with Aftab's father to that shrine, for they too had great faith in the powers of that grave, but Aftab, still faithful to Guga's reformism, did not go. He concentrated instead on getting back to the heroic destiny he believed was his. When he was about to set out for Srinagar, however, the newspapers reported that Hizbullah boys had killed Maulana Masoodi, the National Conference's first general secretary—octogenarian by then, retired to a cottage near Ganderbal. Angry with Guga for having done this just when he had to undertake the dangers of the journey home, Aftab decided to return to Muzaffarabad.

There he found the ISI busy trying to wean his friend Javed Mir to its agenda—for, now that Yasin and Hamid were in jail, he was the JKLF's chief commander. Javed enjoyed the feel of that but it also frightened him. He was good at lighting a fuse or aiming a pistol but was not cut out for command and control. He blanched when the brigadier who had encountered Azam's stolid obstinacy remarked, eyebrows peaking as he slapped his palm with a baton, that he hoped Javed would reach home safely. A few days later, Javed signed a scrap of paper that said he would announce in Kashmir that the JKLF was willing for Kashmir to be merged with Pakistan.

Salahuddin was ecstatic. He took Javed and Aftab for a thanksgiving prayer at the King Faisal mosque in Islamabad and brought the best sweets back to celebrate in Muzaffarabad. And the brigadier flew all the way to Kathmandu with the two of them, even taking them shopping there. From there, by bus, train and a taxi from Jammu, Aftab and Javed returned to Srinagar in the spring of 1991. Javed kept his head down for a few days, though, staying near Hazratbal while he tried to figure out what to tell his comrades.

Nanhaji had been running the JKLF since the days when Yasin had been recuperating at Brain. He was brashly prone to fisticuffs but commanded more respect among the cadre than did Javed. Hearing that Javed was back, Nanha sent some boys to haul him in like a captive. A shouting match ensued when Nanha discovered that Javed

had accepted 100,000 rupees from the ISI, which had not even been handed to Javed but to the doctor who had accompanied Javed and Aftab from Kathmandu.

Nanha had been fuming since an intermediary, claiming to speak on behalf of Pakistan's army chief, had been in touch with him. Pakistan would provide weapons, he had promised, plus 1,500 rupees a month for each militant and organizational expenses—a budget of up to 10 million rupees a month for the outfit—if the JKLF accepted the possibility that Kashmir could merge with Pakistan.

Nanha had sent a clear reply, burning effigies of both prime ministers and pasting posters that showed a figure dressed in a typical Kashmiri white cap being bitten by two dogs, one black, one red. A young friend whose family owned a bakery turned up to say that Ashok Patel was delighted. Nanha's efforts to re-establish JKLF's dominance went into top gear that spring, his energy fired no doubt by determination to show how much more competent he was than the recently returned Javed. He had already rudely issued an ultimatum to Guga to wind up Hizbullah. Now he rounded up a dozen Hizb men, locked them in a stronghold at Rainawari and girded for war with that group. Determined to re-merge Hilal Beg's Students' Liberation Front with the JKLF, he had earlier had Hilal abducted from Batmaloo and dictated terms. Hilal's group had agreed to change its name (choosing Ikhwan-ul Muslimeen, inspired by the Egyptian example) rather than accept the parent group's suzerainty.

Nanha's brief run of success ended with that. On 27 April 1991, the very day the new name was announced, Nanha was briefing one of his deputies in the back of a Maruti car about how he was to run a new Students' Liberation Front, directly affiliated to the JKLF, when a bunker opened fire at the vehicle. The putative Students' Liberation Front chief was killed on the spot and Nanha taken captive. That put paid to Nanha's ultimatum to Guga.

After spending a few days revitalizing his spirits in his father's idyllic village, Aftab tried to take charge of operations. He had been a dedicated disciple of Guga's religiosity but had, at least since his battle on the Line of Control, decided that he was a far more suitable field commander. As luck would have it, he had been back just a couple of months when Guga was captured. It was a dramatic operation. Seven hundred soldiers descended on Batmaloo, Hizbullah's den, at

lunchtime from three directions, some down the bypass from the airport, others along the main road from Lal Chowk. The brigadier in charge had figured that no one would bother as long as the jeeps and trucks remained on the thoroughfares but that bedlam would break loose as soon as they turned into Batmaloo. It did. As if a tornado had suddenly swung towards it, Batmaloo ran as army vehicles raced down its narrow streets to their target. Even the machine guns that militant boys constantly manned on rooftops near the edges of Batmaloo were too surprised by the size of the attack to react. As the convoys screeched up to the house where Guga had convened a meeting, the soldiers shot a couple of Hizbullah boys leaping out.

An informer whom the Intelligence Bureau had paid 100,000 rupees sat in the brigadier's jeep: the Spotter. Peering through holes in his mask, he scanned the boys that were rounded up. Guga was not among them. The Spotter slipped away then, to mingle, while the triple cordon the brigadier had prepared fell quickly into place. Through the rest of the day, the soldiers searched. Batmaloo remained uproarious, yelling, screaming, but the army had learnt by now to take Kashmir's histrionics in its stride. This was like the nocturnal din on mosque loudspeakers, calculated to unnerve.

That night, Brigadier Naseeb Katoch was wondering dejectedly whether to lift the cordon when the Spotter slipped up to whisper tersely that Guga was still there. Next morning, the search was redoubled. Something niggled at the brigadier's mind as he stood beside his vehicle, watching the search, not far from the house where the Hizbullah men had been meeting. He noticed that the breast-pounding women became shriller each time a soldier went near a chicken coop that lay outside a nearby shop. Wire mesh wound around a rough frame of thin metal slats, the coop sat on a roughly hewn wooden platform beside the road. His little round eyes narrowing, the brigadier ordered his men to look under the platform. Guga emerged, filthy from lying crumpled there for twenty hours.

When he had cleaned up, the brigadier sat him down on a chair and smiled widely, determined that he would bring Guga round to see sense. Field commanders often see themselves as statesmen and this one had already made some headway with Babar, whom he had caught a couple of months before this raid. That had bucked him up no end, for the brigadier had been impressed with Babar from the

moment he had been captured. In the interrogation regarding arms dumps that immediately follows after a militant has been caught—before comrades have a chance to remove the weapons—Babar had said superciliously that as chief commander, his task was to give orders, not keep track of where the weapons required were stocked. Even the Intelligence Bureau and other senior officers who had flown in from Delhi could extract little from him. But Brigadier Katoch would not give up. Requesting that Babar be imprisoned at his camp, he had got him to watch operations to realize that the army did not routinely rape and pillage, or kill wantonly.

By the time Guga was captured, Babar was just beginning to come round and the brigadier thought that in Guga he had found another potential convert. This time, however, he was grappling not with a nationalist guerrilla but with the ardour of those many, many thousands that the eternal rewards of jihad have mesmerized over 1400 years.

'What can you do? How many can you kill? The Shah of Iran with all his army could do nothing,' said Guga, his eyes sparkling with religious fervour.

Thinking that rigged elections was the problem in Kashmir, the brigadier tried a different tack. 'This is your country. You run it. Fight an election and lead your people. But you must realize that you are too small to leave this country.'

Almost none of the army officers in charge of combating militancy knew the ideological differences that Kashmir's movement encompassed. Brigadier Katoch was one of the most empathetic of them but he did not know that Guga had resolutely shunned the 1987 elections, that he thought the will of the people was anarchic, the Bismarckian state the devil's handiwork. Guga's nation spanned the world and it had to be brought round to the true path, all of it, under the benevolent, enlightened direction of God's Caliph.

'How many can you kill?' he repeated. 'You cannot force us to live with you.'

The brigadier's amiability reached its limit. Grabbing Guga by the scruff, he threw him to the floor. 'You deserve to be eliminated,' he growled.

Immediately after Guga's arrest, Aftab seized the opportunity to take charge. Calling Kashmiri press persons to Batmaloo, he announced at a secret press conference that his name was Shahid-ul Islam—Guga had called himself Mushtaq-ul Islam—and said he would prove wrong the government's assertion that the Hizbullah was finished. He quickly placed trusted men in key positions, one to manage funds, another—whom he brought in from Harkat, the Pakistan-based group he had befriended in 1990—in charge of operations. Then, donning the mantle of statesman-diplomat, he took a boat up the valley's web of lakes and rivers to meet one of Babar's commanders. An old friend, that commander would welcome him warmly, he was sure. On the way, he stopped in Sopore to meet Majid Dar, the man Salahuddin had brought into the Hizb. Now that Babar Badr had joined JKLF commanders Yasin and Hamid behind bars, and Salahuddin was across the mountains, Majid was arguably the most important commander in the valley.

It was a smart tactic. If Hizbullah's other young leaders were uneasy about Aftab grabbing Guga's mantle, they could hardly question the movement's ambassador-at-large, discoursing with the most respected commanders on behalf of the United Jihad Council. Diplomatic hoopla spins a dazzling shroud over domestic instability.

Pageantry helps too. Meticulously, Aftab arranged a parade of all the gun-toting boys in Batmaloo. They were to march past him in the largest park there on 14 August, Pakistan's Independence Day. There was even a photographer to take pictures as Aftab, smart Ray Bans resplendent over trim, black beard and dark blue salwar-kameez, saluted scores of boys with guns on their shoulders. Guga wanted a global Islamic order but a bit of flag-waving was much more spectacular, and it appealed to Batmaloo's Pakistani heart. The JKLF boys in Batmaloo did not march, chary of saluting the Pakistan flag, but Javed arranged for them to mount rooftop guard at every corner of Batmaloo that day.

The place had become a comforting home for the Hizbullah. Even women carried ammunition—and trays loaded with glasses of milk—down the inner lanes when Hizbullah boys battled the forces. And groups of Hizbullah men roamed casually down Batmaloo's narrow streets, guns slung carelessly over their shoulders.

Life was not entirely a romantic hoopla of heroics, however. Aftab's detractors were sending distressed messages to Guga in jail soon enough—and getting encouraging responses. But, ignoring both the cadre's restiveness and the ever-present fear of capture, Aftab sailed on, buoyed by a heroic self-image. He took to keeping bodyguards—for security as much as image. One, nicknamed Boxer, was a shadow, doubling conveniently as man Friday.

One day, when Aftab wanted to visit one of the Hizb founders who had just returned from Muzaffarabad and set up camp near Salahuddin's Budgam home, he asked Boxer to hire a car from Barzala. That was the den of car thieves and their trade thrived even more amid the mayhem. But when Boxer turned up an hour before the time appointed for the meeting, it was with a motorcycle. Aftab was upset, for he had wanted to impress the Hizb man. He quickly phoned to request a friend who owned a car to drive him to Budgam. The friend came and, as Boxer followed the car on the motorcycle, another friend whom they passed on the road clambered onto the motorcycle pillion. When the car was stopped at a checkpoint just beyond Barzala on the airport road, Aftab leaned across his nervous friend to smile and ask if there was a problem. The soldiers waved them on but stopped the motorcycle, looking intently from a slip of paper at the vehicle's number plate. When they detained both Boxer and the pillion rider, Aftab raced on to the rendezvous spot to tell the Hizb men not to let their commander come. The place was too 'hot', since Boxer might reveal the venue of the meeting under torture. Having warned the Hizb, Aftab returned to the safety of Batmaloo.

Aftab waited tensely for Boxer, who returned a couple of days later to say that the soldiers had had the motorcycle registration number and had insisted that the pillion rider was Shahid-ul Islam. The motorcycle belonged to Boxer's brother, which he had offered when he heard Boxer was going to hire a car for his commander. Aftab told Boxer to bring his brother to meet him the next day.

When the brothers arrived, Aftab asked Boxer to wait outside. Then two of the other boys in the room grabbed the brother's arms and Aftab punched his stomach. While he was doubled over, one of the boys hefted a bucket of water across the room and the two holding his arms forced him to kneel while Aftab pushed his head into the pail. When he let him come up, the man gasped furiously for air, his face red as a tomato. While he was still gasping, Aftab forced a glass of water between his teeth. Glass by glass, he poured half a bucket down the man's throat.

The vomit hit his hand, belching like a spurting geyser. The man shook as tears flowed from his bulging eyes. A terrified hand flew up when Aftab held up another glass of water. Gasping wretchedly through his sobs, he yelled that he was not alone, that Hizbullah boys too were involved. He collapsed in a crumpled, heaving heap as the boys let his arms go and Aftab went out to investigate a commotion. A couple of neighbouring shopkeepers were yelling at Boxer. They had seen his brother lurking around the lane the day Guga had been captured, they said. As soon as he heard that, Aftab picked up a couple of electrical wires and strode back in, slamming the door shut behind him. Boxer's brother had begun to recover his breath but collapsed in a writhing, sobbing mess when he saw the wires. Speaking in a rush, he named one of Hizbullah's senior members. That man had made the deal to have Guga caught, he said.

By that time, the man was in Delhi, no doubt stashing his reward safely. He had asked Guga for leave a few days before getting him arrested. Before he returned, Aftab got together the half-dozen boys Hizbullah called commanders; they decided that the fellow must be put to death. He was tortured when he returned until he named two others. On the third day after Id, all three were executed.

Unfettered by institutional checks—the state and the family—militant commanders developed their own norms as to which life it was or was not right to end. As insurance for his conscience, Aftab got his boys to consult Islamic clerics, the local ulema, and they confirmed the sentence. But those clerics would have needed nerves of steel to face down the possibility of being dubbed government agents had they refused to sanction the executions. Abbas Ansari, now out of jail, had been installed as chairman of the supreme council that Hilal had set up to give his renamed group political respectability, but even Ansari was rudely disparaged at meetings by gun-wielding boys.

As in any war, the sanctity of human life got short shrift from those who wielded weapons on either side. The officer in charge of an operation to catch Aftab and his comrades at Dal gate ordered five teenagers of the locality shot in front of the assembled neighbourhood on the field opposite the lake where they had been rounded up. Some

JKLF boys, who had got into a fight over some girls with those Hizbullah boys, had had them reported to the army.

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Sadly, abductions made bigger news than killings on either side, for well-connected persons were rarely killed. What happened to them in captivity, however, made for more interesting reading than reports on efforts to find them. One of the more illuminating stories of captivity featured a couple of Aftab's vitctims.

Aftab was visiting home one day when the dynamic teenager he had appointed area commander for Dal gate turned up to say that Khemlata Wakhlu, a Pandit who had been a minister in the state government, was at her house just below the temple hill. Only a couple of policemen were on guard and his boys could easily capture her and her husband—who too had celebrity value, having been principal of the engineering college until Farooq had sacked him (perhaps because his wife participated in the 1984 coup through which Indira Gandhi had replaced Farooq with his brother-in-law).

Aftab gave the nod and that began the Wakhlus' nightmare odyssey. They were forced up the valley, via the storm-tossed Wular lake to areas beyond Baramula, encountering on the way some of the cultural tussles that Kashmir collectively confronted during those years. A couple of days after they had crossed the Wular, they were taken to an elegant old house. Finally relaxing there in the presence of a white-haired lady as charming as the house, the Wakhlus engaged in a debate on the difference between culture and religion with a Hizb man who was helping Aftab's boys in that faraway area.

When the old lady mentioned that she had undertaken to distribute *teher,* turmeric rice, at a shrine when a militant relative recovered from a gunshot injury, the Hizb man expostulated that they had to stop such nonsense. 'They worship anyone and anything,' he said, 'a tree, a horse, a donkey, a grave. One is *kulbab saib,* another *guribab saib,* or *tulbab saib*.' The Wakhlus came to the shocked old lady's defence but, predictably, made little headway against such strident Jamaat positions.

If the Jamaat's reformist dedication to a monocultural template was being shaken in that phase, it was because they were confronted with far more blinkered conceptions. Just a few weeks earlier, there had been a far more serious altercation than the Wakhlus' little debate. A Hizb company had angrily taken up cudgels in defence of Kashmir's traditional ways against a bunch of boys newly arrived from the Dawat-ul-Irshad madrasa. Gruff teenagers from the rural outback of Pakistan and Afghanistan, they had been weaned on rousing promises of booty. Un-bathed for days, their beards, faces and pajamas were grimy and rumpled. Underlining their origins from the socio-economic margins of Pakistan, their mien made their assertions that much less palatable to the local Hizb boys. Those who prayed at graves were kafir idolaters, they had argued. So their women were halal for them, sanctioned by God. As were the women of anyone who had worked for the infidel government. Not just Pandit women like Khemlata, even her Muslim hostess would, to those boys, have been justifiable objects for rape.

The Hizb boys might have had some reformist zeal but outsiders eyeing Kashmiri women was a far more basic matter. It generated instinctive rage rather than counter-arguments. Yelling furiously, they had cocked their guns. Their local commander, Zubair-ul Islam, rushed in and, finding the two groups ready to kill each other, had cocked his automatic and ordered the Pakistanis to raise their hands. They were locked up until Majid Dar arrived and suavely explained what was required of them for the moment.

A few days after their discussion on the validity of ancient superstitions, the Wakhlus got into a debate on social culture. They were in a house that local JKLF boys used like a clubhouse and the debate centred on nationalism. When the JKLF boys dismissed Khemlata's arguments that they had had democracy until they took up the gun, she changed tack to say that many of their captors had told her they preferred Kashmir's merger with Pakistan to independence. They replied that they were taking Pakistan's help now but would turn away from it when the time came. Laughing, she responded with an adage: Kashmiris had first eaten India's liver and would now eat Pakistan's.

The boys disparaged the Indian forces, speaking of how they sometimes brought back weapons across the Line of Control by bribing border patrols. Personal wealth was more important to some of the officers than the nation they served, they said contemptuously. Khemlata's husband then turned the focus towards another aspect

of culture, one that applied to corrupt soldiers as much as to his audience. Nothing would come of their struggle if they did not develop character, he told them. When the boys reacted angrily, asserting that they did have character, he explained his point the Kashmiri way—with a couple of stories.

He and his wife had been in Germany many years ago when a milk van overturned on the busy road just outside their house. Thousands of bottles of milk crashed onto the road. Within minutes everyone from the adjacent shops and houses had brought out buckets and shovels and brushes and pans to clean the road. Soon, traffic was moving as if nothing had happened.

He had been reminded of that incident when a horse-cart got stuck in a marshy ditch near their house in Dal gate some years later, he continued. Everyone in the vicinity gathered to watch, all shouting loudly at the driver to hold the horse's ears so that water did not get in, but no one lifted a finger to help. The poor man held up the horse's ears while trying to push his cart out of the ditch but could not do both. Finally, as the man struggled in vain, the horse drowned, dragging the cart with it.

The JKLF boys listened quietly as the professor spoke of character, referring to what the Germans did. 'We should think of this country as ours. But instead, we only destroy everything. And then wait, thinking that independence will come.'

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Within weeks of the Wakhlus' abduction, Aftab had negotiated the release of Guga and a couple of other senior comrades. That was when things went awry. Guga refused to be released in exchange for a captured woman. It was un-Islamic, he declared.

Ishfaq too had stirred a hornet's nest of puritan criticism when he had abducted Rubaiya a year and a half earlier, but the bumbling Indian government had unwittingly salvaged him. Aftab, on the other hand, was up against not just general social censure but his own mentor. Not only did Guga snub him by refusing to be freed, he allowed another senior comrade, who had been captured with him, to be released instead—thus creating an alternative focus of leadership within the Hizbullah.

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Running Amok

Ali Sheikh's wife gripped the door, pale as a sheet. His son and daughter clung to his arms to stop the saucer-eyed old man from jumping out the back window. They were in a first floor room of the house he had built and the window was 15 feet above the ground. Although he was about sixty now, a leap to escape seemed worthwhile to Ali Sheikh.

It was the middle of the night and a man was calling for him from the front yard. The family, peeping from an upstairs window, had recognized the man even though he wore a mask. He was a young neighbour affiliated with the Jamaat. Several other shadowy figures lurked in the lane outside the gate and the man kept calling for Ali Sheikh even after his son repeatedly said that Ali Sheikh had gone to his sister's house near Ganderbal for the night.

Before he finally left, the man threw a crumpled piece of paper at the doorstep and told the family to give it to Ali Sheikh. Ali Sheikh's son crept down at dawn and opened the door a crack to pull the paper in. It was a letter of resignation from the National Conference. The moment he saw it, Ali Sheikh knew what he had to do. Party workers were doing it all over the valley. Waiting until the morning got a little busier, he made his way to the party office in Srinagar and hung around until the general secretary would see him. The man understood as soon as Ali Sheikh began to narrate his trauma of the previous night. The party could not protect Ali Sheikh, he said, and he must do what he thought fit.

The Hizb was still weak in the city but the Jamaat men Salahuddin had dispatched in March 1991 to take charge had built a strong rural network by the time 1992 rolled around. Members of the Jamaat cadre had eagerly gotten into a symbiotic cinch with the Hizb and, naturally, had turned their newfound clout bitterly against the party

that had burnt their homes and axed their orchards the day Bhutto had been hanged.

After he had resigned, Ali Sheikh went to a newspaper office to advertise the fact. This was the key to staying alive.

That night, he stayed at a relative's house in Manigam. He had no idea then how long his nightmare would last but it would be several years before he dared to sleep at home again. Life turned sharply around for National Conference workers during those years. Villagers who had fawned on Ali Sheikh for years, hoping to benefit from his 'contacts' and 'back' (as Kashmir liked to called patronage), now shunned him, hurrying past if they saw him on the road. 'We have been reduced to living like cobblers,' Ali Sheikh would hiss on the rare occasion he bumped into another party man—exposing in the prejudice of that remark one of the reasons for his and his party's ignominy.

It was Jamaat men who now basked in fawning sycophancy. It was not as if Kashmir was any more convinced by Jamaat doctrines, but conviction had never been a match for power as a determinant of Kashmir's preferences. Indeed, Jamaat's avowed values fell by the wayside in its cadre's scramble for power and lucre, and this period made it evident that puritan doctrines by themselves were insufficient to morally order Kashmir's society. Kashmir discovered between 1991 and 1993 that fundamentalist, totalitarian and fascist groups can be much worse than selfish individuals in chaotic pursuit of individual aims at the expense of others. For such groups too pursue self-interest, in concert with a network, while ascribing to that network the power to control society.

Jamaat activists set themselves up in different corners of the valley as arbiters of rectitude but functioned as little tyrants. Men and women were summoned at will and given orders which the Hizb cadre enforced. Marital and property disputes were arbitrarily settled and divorces sometimes ordered. Pandit land was parcelled out to favourites for as little as 1,000 rupees at times—to be paid to *Takht-e-Suleiman*, Solomon's Throne, the grand title that groups of Jamaat men gave to their kangaroo tribunals in certain villages.

Those tribunals were more self-possessed than wise. One ordered a man whose donkey had damaged a neighbour's vegetable patch to pay 1,200 rupees in damages, then added that the donkey was to be forfeited to the neighbour if he failed to pay. The man promptly handed over his donkey and went home snickering. Another donkey would

cost him a mere 400 rupees. Judgements were not always ludicrous, though. Men were lashed, tied naked to electricity poles and left to starve in shame. Some were even hanged from trees, accused of having collaborated with the government.

Ali Sheikh was summoned to one such tribunal in Lar. He stood in terror before his three judges in the defunct government hospital while a rowdy crowd jeered. Only his niece's husband stood beside him, a man who was close to the Jamaat but felt a duty to his mother-in-law's brother. The judges peremptorily told Ali Sheikh that he had not mended his ways even after resigning from the National Conference. He had nothing more to do with the party, he replied deferentially, and regretted ever having got involved with it. He begged their forgiveness. What if they did not accept his plea, one of the judges replied, enjoying the sight of the once-powerful man grovelling. He would beg pardon again, said Ali Sheikh. As the men continued to berate him, he asked forgiveness once more, remembering the Quranic injunction that a man should be forgiven thrice. But many of the young fellows in the room had come in the spirit of those who once crowded the French revolution's trials—for a spectacle of humiliation, preferably gory. Voices rang out: 'Thief', 'Agent', 'Devil'. One fellow shoved Ali Sheikh, snorting, 'Pimp'.

His sister's son-in-law sprang to his defence, hitting the assailant across his face. Others jumped up and in an instant there was a mêlée. Seizing his chance, Ali Sheikh scampered out and into the forests above Lar. His niece's husband went straight to the ranking Jamaat man in Manigam—one who as the Muslim United Front's candidate in 1987 had lost by a couple of hundred votes to the National Conference. A sober man, he promised that Ali Sheikh would be spared as long as he kept his head down and steered clear of the National Conference.

That former candidate was among the few Jamaat members who kept their feet firmly on the ground in those heady days of Jamaat–Hizb anarchic rule. Some of the others were unrestrained. One of the men who had sat in judgement on Ali Sheikh was from Banihal at the opposite edge of the valley. Setting himself up with lots of paper in Kangan, the largest town east of Manigam, he routinely dispatched slips—to forest officers, civil engineers and assistant directors, of fisheries or horticulture or animal husbandry. Those slips extracted contracts, for construction, supplies or timber felling—and payments too, making the inspection of contracted work perilous.

Another of Ali Sheikh's judges had a woman stripped and beaten not far from the grave of the mystic pir at which Ali Sheikh had been named. The woman had refused to return to her husband. That judge—who was expelled from the Jamaat a few years later—would summon other women home, or to the dilapidated hospital, and deal with them alone for a couple of hours.

Such trysts by men like him left them in no position to rein in the lust of Hizb boys, so rape became par for the course—as at least one young Gujjar girl climbing towards her home on the slopes above Manigam late one evening, a bale of grass on her head, realized. Tired, she put the grass down on a wall and sat down to rest, gazing at the gold of the ripening maize. She did not react when she saw two Hizb boys from Lar coming towards her with guns. When they reached her, leering, one of them asked what she was doing. 'Resting. I'm tired,' she said softly, turning her eyes away to shut out their lechery. It did not work. One of them seized her arm and threw her to the ground. He would kill her if she opened her mouth, he said. When she cried out, the other put his boot on her breast and pointed his gun at her. Both raped her.

Ali Sheikh often noticed a woman, who was distantly related to him, roaming around Manigam grinning from ear to ear. Poor and illiterate, she used to come to him for help in the old days but all her three sons had since become militants. Although the youngest returned before he reached the Line of Control, she was sure the heroic roles her other sons were playing would bring her great fortune in the new world that was around the corner.

One day, Ali Sheikh asked her irritably why she was laughing. 'Because I am happy,' she laughed back.

'You laugh now. You will cry one day,' he muttered darkly.

He was right. Her middle son, who had joined the JKLF, was nabbed by Hizb men and starved for a fortnight. Through those days and nights, they dripped hot wax onto his naked frame. Then they sent her a message. She could see her son in a certain village. She rushed there to find his tortured body strung from a tree with a wire. She spent days hysterically begging for help but no one would help her take the body down. Instructions had been pasted on the mosque door: anybody who took that body down would be killed. Few tears were shed for him, though. He too had killed people who had refused to feed him or let him have his way with the women in their homes—when he wanted a change from the Gujjar he regularly slept with.

Not every Jamaat man was pleased with what colleagues were doing in tandem with the Hizb, though. The Jamaat chief, Hakim Ghulam Nabi, was horrified at first—although he too fell in line after the first couple of years. He had been chosen chief only because he was too genial to fight detractors. He never sanctioned the kangaroo courts or Jamaat's patronage of the Hizb but could do nothing to stop them. He said nothing even when the media mistakenly called Geelani by his title: amir-e-Jamaat. Later he would argue that since Jagmohan had banned the Jamaat and many members were in jail, he could not convene a council meeting. 'No one has the right to kill,' he would say on his deathbed, adding, 'Hindus and Muslims were one. Europeans taught us this nationalism. They are making us fight even today. If we fight, they get a market.'

His frustration at what the cadre was doing had erupted hysterically one day in the early 1990s during a visit to Karri Saifuddin, who had trekked with Saduddin to Dar-ul-Islam half a century earlier. Weeping like a child, the amir kept hitting his own forehead with his palm like a gong. As he rocked back and forth on his haunches, his sobs merged into a plaintive wail and his hands flew to his head, clawing his grey hair as if he would wrench the roots out.

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The Jamaat–Hizb partnership had an easy run in rural Kashmir between 1991 and 1993, for the Indian establishment adopted the classic statist strategy: control the capital and ignore rural areas. Ashok Patel focussed on capturing the city-based heroes who commanded various outfits other than the Hizb. To get to them, he used the leaders of the JKLF, who had by this time been reduced for the most part to spectators. Kashmir's ancient propensity to play both sides was so strong among them that they fell in line after listening in jail to Patel's depressing exposition of their group's circumstances and options. Hamid telephoned Nanha within weeks of being captured, to suggest a plan that Nanha at that stage refused to go along with. But when Nanha too was captured, the fighting spirit went out of him—and out of many others.

In May 1992, Hamid and Nanha found themselves lodged together in a luxury suite meant for senior politicians behind the Tourist Reception Centre. That VIP treatment was meant to soften them but it backfired. Convincing themselves that they were in a suite in which Indira Gandhi had once stayed, the boys got such bloated heads that they kept the director general of police waiting in the corridor for so long one morning while they got ready that he stalked out to order their immediate transfer to different Joint Interrogation Centres (JICs).

Nanha was sent to the most inhuman centre in Kashmir, at the old airport. Locked into cells about 4.5 feet by 6 feet, prisoners had to grope in the dark to distinguish between the tin pan on which their food was pushed in and the leaky tin box for ablutions. Boys who knew of it called the worm-infested place *Zou*-IC instead of JIC, *zou* being Kashmiri for lice. Bitta Karate, who had killed dozens of Pandits, had become so depressed after spending a few months there that he told Nanha he had gotten hold of a broken glass bottle and was going to slice an interrogator to death and then himself.

Nanha finally saw sunlight a month later, when he was taken to Patel's own JIC—generally called Papa Two. Patel, the director general of police and Patel's rival, the head of the Central Reserve Police Force, were waiting to meet him. They had a problem. An Israeli from among a group that another militant outfit had abducted had, while trying to escape, fallen into JKLF hands and the officers wanted Nanha's help to get him released. Nanha sulked furiously at first, refusing to speak. Then he exploded, asking if they knew what sort of hell he had been in. Perhaps they did not. For when, having helped the policemen, Nanha passed through the old airport a couple of weeks later, en route to a jail outside the valley, those cells had been converted into toilets.

After toying, during the days following the Israeli's release, with the idea of exchanging Nanha for an abducted deputy superintendent of police, Patel released Hamid instead, having brought him round to a new strategy after a trip to Agra, where Yasin was jailed. Hamid had been weaned over several months. The previous winter, Hamid's father had found himself hurriedly shooed out of Hira Nagar jail, where he had gone to meet his son. The Union minister, Rajesh Pilot, was coming to meet the boy, he was told.

Once he was released, Hamid did what he could to whip some energy and discipline into the effete outfit—even having a couple of men hung by their feet while they were beaten—but he had to struggle to dispel the impression that he had been released after a deal. He spoke of forging unity among the groups and even went to meet Salahuddin, now back at his Budgam stronghold. Salahuddin, too astute a politician to reveal his hand, received Hamid like a prodigal: a sheep was slaughtered for a feast while Salahuddin agreed with great gusto to the boy's talk of unity. Whether or not Hamid would have been able to get the major militant commanders together and also persuade them to talk terms with the government is debatable—fate had other plans for him.

Hamid's end came on 19 November 1992 when trying to escape a cordon that was laid without Patel's knowledge. A large number of boys tried to get away on a boat across the Jhelum but, seeing the glint of automatic weapons, a bunker on one of the bridges opened fire and the overloaded boat capsized amid the tumult that the firing caused. The river runs deep through the inner city and Hamid, like most Kashmiris, could not swim. The twenty-two-year-old boy's body was found clutching the weeds at the bottom of the river.

The false identity card found in Hamid's pocket said his name was Dr Faisal. Hamid's father had always wanted the boy to be a doctor.

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Templates under Stress

Unlike Ishfaq's death in March 1990, Hamid's death did not clear the field for the Hizb-ul Mujahideen. The JKLF was not a serious competitor by late 1992. In fact, now that Jamaat's political Islam had squashed JKLF's freedom struggle, the Hizb leadership faced a more radical competitor: transnational jihad. The Jamaat's senior leaders were so rattled by the new development that, a couple of months after Hamid's death, they took the substantial risk of getting caught at a meeting with Hizb's top brass.

There were eight cordons of Hizb security for them, from the tight one right round the house where the meeting was to take place to the farthest ring at the edge of Sopore 10 kilometres away. Hizb boys increased and tightened the cordons every day as the leaders gathered one by one, most of them brought under cover of freezing darkness. The village, Behrampura, was safe enough, dominated by the Jamaat, but the boys simply could not be too careful. Hakim Ghulam Nabi came for this meeting, and his predecessor, Ghulam Mohammed Bhat, along with Bhat's antagonist, Geelani. From the Hizb came Salahuddin and his right hand, Majid Dar.

They were a deeply worried lot. The grey-bearded men all nodded unhappily as Salahuddin told them that the ISI seemed to be playing games. Not only had Pakistani boys been turning up since the beginning of December 1992, they carried superior arms. They had already been coming, under the banner of the Gujjar dominated Al Barq, but were now functioning under the aegis of jihad-oriented groups based in Pakistan: Harkat-ul-Jehad-Islami and Lashkar-e-Tayyaba. Could it be that the ISI was doing to the Hizb what it had once used the Hizb to do to the JKLF? Everybody agreed that someone whom the ISI would take seriously ought to go across and sort it out.

Then Salahuddin turned to the other worry: rivalry among Jamaat leaders had made a mess of the Hizb camp in Muzaffarabad. The problem was complicated by the links these leaders had established with the Pakistan and Azad Kashmir chapters of the Jamaat. So, in the presence of his seniors, Salahuddin wrote a letter to the man in charge there, ordering him to snap all financial and administrative links with the Azad Kashmir Jamaat.

The conversation returned to the first, and potentially more serious, problem. Salahuddin suggested that Majid would be the best man to deal with the ISI. Salahuddin had come to lean heavily on the level-headed Majid, always polite but firm, capable of cutting straight to the nub of a problem and coming up with the most effective solution. A couple of the older men were a trifle dubious since Majid seemed too junior, but they kept quiet. Salahuddin must know what he was doing.

Majid said he was honoured by their trust and no doubt beamed a radiant smile around the circle, particularly at Geelani, in whose office he had worked a few years before. But if he was to be effective, he added, he would have to be placed clearly in charge. They all nodded in agreement but Majid was not going to cross the mountains on the basis of a nod. He called for pen and paper and quickly wrote a letter that gave him full charge of all Hizb operations across the Line of Control. He passed it around, still no doubt beaming genially, and they all signed. A week later, on 25 January 1993, he set off.

Salahuddin had been right. Charming, firm, clear-headed, Majid was up to the task. Dissolving the council that ran the Hizb camp in Muzaffarabad, he took control. Then he turned to the ISI brass. Convincing them that the Hizb would clean up its act, he got them to restore Hizb's primacy in operations. The amounts Hizb received from the Kashmir Liberation Cell soared thereafter. From that time on, the ISI streamlined its policy. The bulk of the funding and other support went to the Hizb, although small amounts continued to go to smaller groups for another year or two.

The Pakistanis who had been trickling in still came but kept a low profile. They had little to do with Kashmir's politics or its future. Zubair-ul Islam, who had made arrangements for that meeting in Behrampura, came across one such with a postgraduate degree in geography. Seeing that he was highly educated, Zubair asked him for

his assessment of how long it would take for Kashmir to win freedom. The man replied phlegmatically that he had no idea and less interest. All he cared about was obtaining martyrdom as soon as he could, so that he could earn eternal blessings for himself and those he loved.

He had been schooled in the vast madrasa at the Dawat-ul-Irshad Markaz. Television was banned on that campus, even pictures. As for music, only cassettes of songs and speeches exhorting jihad were allowed. It was based on the premise that militant jihad and learning are synergetic, the perception focussed through the prism of memory: thirty-six relatives of Professor Hafiz Saeed, the centre's head, had been slaughtered while migrating to Sargodha during the partition. With a master's degree in Arabic and Islamic studies, Saeed had taught in Riyadh before he was hired to teach Islam at Lahore's Engineering University.

Pakistani boys from that madrasa had been coming to Kashmir under the aegis of Al Barq. The ISI had not yet permitted Dawat's own militant outfit to fight in Kashmir and Al Barq not only welcomed additions to its ranks, it was the only Kashmir-based group in which Pakistanis felt at home. Al Barq—which was launched under the influence of that ambitious politician of Dardic origin, Abdul Ghani Lone—was full of Gujjars, the tribe of shepherds and goatherds from the valley's edges. Their language and culture was closer to the Pakistanis' Punjabi, Pushto and Balochi than to Kashmiri. So was their bluff simplicity. Terrified of ridicule, Kashmir kept its fine-honed weapon, derision, ever ready just beneath its charm. Its epic history recorded that 1300 years ago its conqueror-king had made south Indians wear tails from their backsides to the ground. Kashmir was less inelegant now but contempt does not need stating. It is felt.

By the end of 1992, though, Dawat-ul-Irshad boys did not need Al Barq's comforting cover any longer. The ISI finally allowed Dawat's militant wing, the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, to operate in Kashmir—causing the Jamaat leadership to gather in Behrampura. Aftab's refined friend from the days when both were trying to get the ISI to register their groups had finally got clearance for his Harkat too, in December 1992. Kabul having fallen to the mujahideen in April that year, many of its jihad-inspired warriors were unoccupied. More important, Nawaz Sharif had appointed the staunchly Islamist General Javed Nasir—often described as maverick—as head of the ISI. Known for

his radical faith, Nasir was close to the Tablighi Jamaat, which was associated with the Harkat groups. There was one other reason why Pakistan wanted to divert these groups to Kashmir at that stage. These groups could fund, train and arm their recruits, and with a Democratic regime freshly elected in Washington, the ISI wanted to be more discreet about what it called Kashmir Ops.

It kept these groups on the peripheries of the operational strategy for the moment though, for the ISI was a little uneasy with their pan-Islamist ideology. For another five years, the ISI would stick resolutely behind its favourite, the Hizb. Its patron, the Pakistan chapter of the Jamaat, had a network of adherents in the army, most of them recruited during the decade of General Zia's rule.

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Transnational jihad trickled in just as Kashmir was swinging away from communal butchery, horrified by the depths to which it had sunk. Its history was a saga of depraved savagery, as if its various social insecurities found catharsis in viciousness, but the bodies that had been found one chill morning in the spring of 1992 made even puckish Kashmir's stomach turn. It was, in the words of the Quran, equal to all humankind having been killed.

Hundreds of inner city Muslims gathered in knots on the streets of Habba Kadal at the edge of the inner city, voices rising shrilly in horror. It was a Pandit home that had witnessed barbarity, one of the few still inhabited. The man, a bus driver who had worked for the transport department, was dead but his wounds said he had first been forced to watch his wife and daughter gang-raped. The seventeen-year-old had been so relentlessly invaded that her body could scarce bear looking at.

T.N. Ganjoo, a Pandit lecturer, had come to bathe the bodies and arrange pyres. He was a phlegmatic man. Since his astrological charts said he and his wife would die naturally, he had stayed when others left, only leaving his wife and mother by themselves for a few days in 1990 while he escorted his son—the seed of his future—to Jammu. So shaken was he by that morning's horror, however, that he spent the next few days discussing options with Hriday Nath Wanchoo, an urbane idealist Pandit from the bungalows up the river, who had

also come for the last rites. Not only had Wanchoo stayed in 1990, he had fought vigorously for Muslims' human rights.

After a few days of anxious murmuring, Wanchoo and Ganjoo decided to build as much of a network of support as they could. So they formed a Kashmir Valley Hindu Forum and drove up and down the valley, from the ruined temple of the sun (the son, legend said, of Kashmir's originator, Kashyap Rishi) at Martand, all the way to the Line of Control. Wherever they went, from spring till the beginning of winter that year of 1992, they networked and counted how many Pandits the third mass exodus had left. They found 22,000 Pandits still living across the valley.

When they had finished counting, though, there was one less. Wanchoo had been killed.

He had held meetings in Delhi on 10 November 1992 to seek amnesty for Kashmir's political prisoners. While there, he had also met several ambassadors to plead support for Kashmir's human rights but even Muslim envoys had told him that they could support a political movement, not an Islamic one. When he reported that to a group of militant commanders at Hazratbal, he met cynical mistrust. One cold night a few days later, gunmen turned up at his door. He told them he had diarrhoea that night, so they left. But they returned next evening and insisted he go with them. The morning after, his tall frame, normally a picture of dignity in a dark suit and tie, lay in a public park, riddled with bullets.

It was 6 December 1992, a traumatic day for idealists who thought Hindus and Muslims could live in harmony. Fifteen hundred kilometres away, on a dusty plain in the heart of India, a mob demolished a mosque that afternoon, a mosque that they said had been built after a grand temple at the birthplace of Lord Rama had been desecrated. The roots of their violence went far deeper, though. The mob saw that mosque as a symbol of centuries of rule by Muslims—and more contemporarily, as a symbol of what they perceived as Nehru's pampering of the Muslims that had stayed in India after the creation of Pakistan.

Most of that mob came from small towns in middle India, young men who subliminally at least blamed that pampering for the limited opportunities they found for the fulfilment of their aspirations fuelled over the past decade by television. As in Kashmir in 1931, 1967 and

1990, this religion-based violence too was at one level the eruption of socio-economic frustrations through the fault line between those templates that had divided the subcontinent in 1947. In 1947, it had been a clash between Gandhian inclusiveness and Muslim separateness. Now, it was a clash between that inclusiveness and Hindu separateness—the way for it having been opened when Gandhian self-abnegation gave way to market-driven competition in the 1980s.

Just as Jinnah had erected a paradigm of exclusive nationhood to channel the socio-economic insecurities of the Muslims of India's heartland in the 1930s and 1940s, the Bharatiya Janata Party and its mentors provided an ideological framework for the mob that demolished this mosque. They envisioned an India built firmly on the rock of a common religion, cultural homogeneity its strength.

This Hindutva, as they called it, was a dangerously wobbly concept. Zionism is such a powerful force because Judaism is founded on genetic unity, the faith that all Jews are descended from a common line of ancestors. That could possibly be true, for Israel is half the size of Haryana. Hinduism on the other hand systematizes ethnic separation, preventing the intermingling of different genetic strains among Hindus—and does so across a country the size of a continent. The way it has been practised for several centuries, Hinduism has become a system to ensure the genetic exclusivity of Brahmins and other castes that consider themselves superior. Without reform then, Hinduism has the potential to generate a centrifugal backlash, and Hindutva could be as great a national weakness as Zionism could be a national strength.

Recognizing this dangerous potential for antagonism within, Gandhi had tried towards the end of his life to end caste-based religiosity, even bribing people to marry outside the caste of their parents. Gandhi, Nehru and Tagore celebrated the rich cultural matrix of Hindu traditions that knit the subcontinent. But they also saw that the only way to keep such a vast variety of ethnic strains—a fifth of humankind—together was to build a nation held together not by exclusivity but by faith in the vision of a shared future. That is why integrating Muslim-majority Kashmir into India was such a passion for Nehru, and why Gandhi had travelled to Srinagar a few days before independence.

Now, the rise of Hindutva in India was sure to accentuate in Kashmir the fears that Sheikh Abdullah had spoken of. In fact, it was

exactly what he had predicted at Ranbirsinghpora in April 1953. Murli Manohar Joshi, the president of the Bharatiya Janata Party, had visited Srinagar months before that mosque was razed, but his mission had been vastly different to Gandhi's. A vain professor of physics more devoted to astrology than astronomy, he cherishes the sacred threads and apical lock that mark Brahmin lineage. Eager to match his predecessor's shrewd political victories, he had driven to Srinagar, holding aloft a flag, followed by busloads of zealots all the way from the southern tip of the country. He arrived for the forty-fifth anniversary of the day on which India had adopted an egalitarian constitution in the name of its people, but he came to plant the flag of India at Lal Chowk, not to reach out to the Kashmiri people.

He might have planned to do it with the élan of a conqueror but it was a pathetic show. Not one face peeped from any window at his motley band, coddled in layer upon layer of security blankets. The flag he had brought across the country flopped down in Lal Chowk, for the stick it was on broke as he tried to thrust it into the heart of Srinagar. Another stick was produced but the freezing earth would not yield for that either. Finally, he unfurled the flag on the thin iron pole that stood beside the clock tower.

The state government had wanted to arrest him before he arrived. But, not wanting to create a political martyr on the eve of a crucial round of elections in Punjab, the prime minister had given the opposition leader a long rope. Then landslides on the road to the valley gave officials a chance to leave his noisy rabble on the highway and lift him to Srinagar in a helicopter. He had arrived shivering on a dreary evening and phoned Zaki, now an adviser to the governor, to ask if the general would stand close to him the next day.

Clearly, that trip to Kashmir was rooted in insecurity rather than in the statesmanship that nation-building requires. It presented a contrast with Wanchoo's courage. Wanchoo and that bus driver's family were killed by Muslim chauvinists but the ideological template of those bestial killers was the same as that of any other community's chauvinists. If such communal antagonisms are indeed spurred by frustrated aspirations, the developmental history of the period can be described as follows: Kashmir's deep-seated sense of self-worth had combined with the agricultural and educational reforms of the 1950s to stimulate its aspirations earlier than in other parts of the

subcontinent. The frustration of those aspirations caused this eruption along its identity fault line. But just as Kashmir was recoiling from the repression that the Hizb and the Jamaat had forced upon it, aspirations had risen in middle India that led to eruptions along the fault line in India's concept of nationhood.

The resulting violence naturally seemed threatening in Kashmir. Just when the sort of violence which that Pandit bus driver's family had endured and that had taken Wanchoo's life had catalysed Kashmir's resentment against Pandits, and many young Kashmiri Muslims had begun to look to India as a land of opportunity where they might fulfil their aspirations, the place had begun to look exclusivist, as if Muslims had no place in it. If India moved towards that monocultural template and became a mirror image of what Pakistan had started out as, it would have no claim to Kashmir except as an occupying imperial power. That could only weaken India, for an empire revolves around its centre, while other parts kowtow. India was far too diverse and complex for that to work.

At a purely tactical level, it was an extremely dangerous move, since transnational jihad entered Kashmir in the very month during which the Babri mosque was demolished. If the promoters of that mob thought they could spur Hindu militancy against a much smaller minority within India, they would soon learn that inter-religious wars were not, in the twenty-first century, going to be limited within national boundaries—and that Pakistan was becoming the heart of global jihad.

PART THREE
1993 to 2007

Desperate Schemes

The winter of 1992–93 was so eventful for Kashmir—although few realized it then—that distance raises tantalizing questions of the 'what if' variety. For, templates of national identity were under strain in both Pakistan and India just when Kashmir had by and large turned away in horror from the militant strategy—although it dared not speak its mind.

A motley group of secessionist politicians got together to try and initiate talks instead, but they lived in fear of their lives and were in any case not taken seriously by New Delhi. For, just then, India changed its tack in Kashmir. It turned away from the intelligence-based strategy that sought to kill militant commanders or to arrest and then wean them over. From 1993 on, India engaged in a kind of 'war on terror', trying to push a particular secessionist leader to power on the one hand, and quelling Kashmir with the might of its armed forces on the other.

The six years beginning 1993 were a terrible wasted opportunity in retrospect. While politics remained in flux in New Delhi and rudderless in Srinagar, the armed forces were too often focussed on medals and rewards—even at times on feathering their nests. They did not fear their enemy, for Kashmir's insurrection was clearly tiring. But by the turn of the century, the transnational mujahideen who had begun to trickle in since December 1992 would take over the field. And defeating them was next to impossible, for they could fight as long as there were boys willing to die for what they considered to be their religious duty.

Many in Kashmir too focussed on feathering their nests. Gone were the days of Ali Sheikh's youth, when two or three courses made a feast. Seven had become standard for a wedding by 1987—and five years on, ten or twelve, fifteen, seventeen or twenty-three. Plastic bags were graciously handed out for excess, as each feast struggled and heaved to outstrip the neighbours'. Violence might have crippled structured economic growth, but Kashmir was awash in hard cash—brought by militants and the forces, sent by expatriates and drug smugglers, poured out by intelligence agencies on more than two sides, unaccounted exports, contracts never executed but paid for.

The times were surely out of joint—gluttony and envy, waste and ridicule tore shamelessly into globs of fat pounded overnight. Kashmir's wazwan feast was the quintessential social democrat repast: neat rows of men or women, each swivelling a few degrees for quartets to surround each *trami*, the large round plate heaped with rice that was indiscernibly partitioned, luscious mutton slopped onto each mound, one fine curry after another, happily shared, none high, none low.

And there are those who revel in chaos.

First, Abbas Ansari—who had tried to run the action committee with Abdullah after the relic crisis and then been the convener of the Muslim United Front—hosted a feast. Sundry politicians smacked their lips, hooded eyes watchful as a new political grouping was spoken of. Then Abdul Ghani Lone, that politician of many hues from up north, hosted another—and the same hooded looks, the same calculating talk, seasoned an equally fine meal.

The idea had come from the least wily of Kashmir's many putative leaders—Fazl-ul Haq Qureshi, who had been the first president of the People's League. It was in the autumn of 1992 that Qureshi padded quietly up to several other leaders, talking earnestly of a political front to give direction to the movement. That had set off the winter of feasting.

In January 1993 then, a fresh invitation went around—from Umar Farooq, the teenager who had succeeded his slain father as mirwaiz. A forum to highlight Kashmir's human rights, his letter spoke of. Nothing more. Now this was tricky for the others. Umar was a callow boy and must have been scarred by his father's assassination, but he had an impassioned flock and a clean slate. The conundrum was swiftly

resolved: he was installed as chairman and a committee formed, without him, to draft a constitution.

It wrangled for months. Shabir Siddiqui, the erudite JKLF representative on the committee, exploded at the idea that the UN resolutions could be their war cry. His group wanted neither India nor Pakistan, he insisted, but independence. After months, they fell back on the ambivalent mantra of the Plebiscite Front: 'the people's right to self-determination'.

What that goal pointed to did not really matter. Who would steer this boat did. The teenager had invited dozens of outfits on board—religious groups, political parties, labour unions, associations. The constitution that was drafted neatly swept most of those into a powerless general council and vested all power in a seven-member executive. When some complained, the constitution makers smoothly put in a working committee between the two other bodies. That sounded like a compromise until they explained: executive members plus two nominees of their organizations would form the working committee. So, when they called general council meetings, organizations that had a member in the executive turned up with three times as many representatives as the other outfits. Qureshi, who had gone round with the idea a year before, was left in the general council.

The All Parties Hurriyat Conference they called this umbrella group, *hurriyat* meaning freedom. It was launched at Hazratbal on 3 September 1993. Abdul Ghani Lone, Abbas Ansari and Professor sat with Mirwaiz Umar on the executive—along with nominees of the People's League, the JKLF and the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Geelani represented the Jamaat, although he was at first suspicious that the need to carry the others along might weaken his iron grip on things. The Hizb still ruled beyond the city, and Salahuddin had by this time taken over the United Jihad Council that Azam and Aftab had launched in Muzaffarabad. So Geelani declared that the Jamaat's stand had been consistent since 1947 and should be acceptable to all realists. The Jamaat would withdraw from the Hurriyat 'the moment we feel it is going in the wrong direction'. Of course, he would not let it. Being on the executive gave him a sufficient whip hand. For the next decade, the story of the Hurriyat remained constant: Geelani kept in check those who wanted to deviate from Pakistan's script.

The result: for at least another five years, the Hurriyat would remain a non-starter.

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Choli ke peechhe kya hai—a shrill pipe band pumped out the notes but the players' bulging eyes reflected nothing of the exuberant playfulness of the song. It was their best piece but the new governor sahib was obviously displeased. In fact, he was not listening to the band at all, as he marched resolutely out of the field in which his helicopter had landed.

The new governor had come to meet the people and he was jolly well going to meet them. He snorted dismissively when the district magistrate said they were too scared to come out. This was not acceptable, said the new governor. He would sack the district magistrate if the people were not there to meet him next time. Then he marched straight towards the eighty-odd fellows the local army unit had rounded up and told them in clipped, no-nonsense tones not to be afraid. His government was going to set things right and make sure there was development. Pakistan could try for a hundred years. It would not get Kashmir.

'*Hum kya chate? Azadi*,' they yelled back.

The brigadier who had had them herded there was just swinging in with his baton when the divisional commissioner stopped him. When the latter told the assembly that they were not compelled to stay, they all left. A few squatted at the edge of the ground to listen since the governor said his piece undeterred. Then he ordered the chief secretary and the director general of police to go and hear their grievances.

The new governor was the old governor, General Krishna Rao. This time round he replaced Saxena (ironically Saxena would one day once again replace him). Kashmir's governors tended to replace each other as Delhi cast about for someone who understood the place, or who someone in Srinagar assured them did. Farooq had assured his friend Rajesh Pilot in Delhi that the general understood Kashmir and Pilot, who was minister for internal security, had lobbied with his mentor, Narasimha Rao.

He probably did not know that the prime minister had already

picked Krishna Rao a couple of years earlier. He had even sounded him out at Rajiv Gandhi's funeral in May 1991, and had sent for the general again in October to tell him Kashmir was so bad it was almost out of India's hands; the general must go in a week. But again he had issued no orders—for that was not his style.

In the spring of 1993, he urgently sent for Krishna Rao once again. Woken by the governor of his state while he was sleeping at home in Hyderabad, Krishna Rao was told a special plane was waiting to take him to Delhi. As the general was being told for the third time in as many years that Kashmir's condition was critical and that he should prepare to go there in a week, the prime minister's personal secretary slipped into the room. His radio-jockey voice dipped smoothly as he said that Saxena had resigned and returned—with his belongings.

Saxena had told the prime minister off a week earlier. He was ready to resign, he had said acidly, but not to fail. As steely as he was suave, Saxena used to tell senior officers that his religion was national interest. So the internal security minister's harping on human rights had jarred on his nerves. The two had been at dagger's drawn ever since the abduction of an Indian Oil Corporation director during an inspection visit to Kashmir by Hilal's renamed Ikhwan-ul Muslimeen in June 1991. Saxena's officers had negotiated the release of relatively minor militants in exchange but the prime minister—some said under pressure from the president—repeated the mistakes of the Rubaiya episode.

The confrontation over human rights had sharpened the previous winter over Operation Tiger and Operation Eagle—Ashok Patel's series of covert catch-and-kill encounters. Those operations had been savage but effective and Saxena was unwilling to let up if, as the prime minister wanted, elections had to be held in 1994. (Elections were a priority in the government's instructions to both Saxena and Krishna Rao. It was urgent, not just to elect a state assembly and government. The Indian Parliament elected in June 1991 had no members from the state. In fact, that house never did.)

The prime minister had pacified Saxena but when it was leaked to the *Indian Express* a week later that he had resigned, Saxena had had enough. He packed his things and left on 10 March 1993. When

he reached Delhi, he called the Prime Minister's Office to say he was not going back. As had happened on 19 January 1990, there was once again a constitutional crisis in the state—no government.

Once the critical message had been delivered in Krishna Rao's presence, the prime minister became more insistent. The general agreed and flew to Jammu a couple of hours later and took the oath of office before returning to Hyderabad to pick up a change of clothes. His man was now the governor, Rajesh Pilot thought contentedly, and Farooq would soon return at the head of a National Conference–Congress coalition. For starters, Farooq's favourite would be installed as chief secretary. But now that he was governor, Krishna Rao spoke to no one except God and the prime minister. He would tell Pilot to his face that he did not know anything.

He intended to conduct elections within six months, and yes, Farooq was still his favourite. But first the general had a war to win. A general without an army was nothing, he told the commander-in-chief for the north. They needed two more divisions. So Krishna Rao advised the commander-in-chief to approach his chief of army staff while he would speak to the prime minister. He left an aide memoire to jog the prime minister along but Rao only sent the chief of army staff to talk to Krishna Rao.

That chief retired in a couple of months and the new chief did not like his men to get bogged down within the borders they were meant to defend. Needing in any case to streamline his million-strong army, he decided on a two-in-one quick-fix: the army would peel off officers and men not up to scratch to form a new force exclusively for such situations as Kashmir. The scheme had been struggling to get off the ground for a couple of years although a few battalions were already operating.

That would take two years, expostulated Krishna Rao, eyes bulging, jaw jutting. None of that did any good. He might be governor but he was no longer the army chief. The new chief recalled even the battalions the previous chief had sent.

Now it was Krishna Rao's turn to tell the prime minister he would resign—if he did not get more forces. And he would have to push back his plan for elections. The prime minister nodded, and did nothing.

In September 1994, a year and a half after he had asked for two more army divisions and a dozen Border Security Force battalions,

Krishna Rao spoke to the army chief to demand where his additional new forces were.

Stuck with the government, was the reply.

Not one to give up, Krishna Rao went back to the prime minister, who summoned his private secretary to see where the file was. The file was in the Prime Minister's Office. The general looked baleful as the new Rashtriya Rifles force was sanctioned in his presence.

Krishna Rao threw as much of the army as he could at Kashmir—blind to the desperation of militants like Aftab, disdainful of the opportunity that the nascent Hurriyat presented, and oblivious to Kashmir's tortured eyes beseeching him for succour from the Hizb and the Jamaat. Zaki would acknowledge some years later that the state government still did not know at this stage how powerful the Hizb was in rural Kashmir, nor that it was the ISI's favourite. The millions that had been spent on intelligence gathering and the sick cruelty that had gone into torture (not even the torture that would make Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison a household name some years later would surpass what happened in Kashmir) had revealed many facts but not the real picture, or insights.

Most of those who were running the state were not concerned about ideologies, leadership or the real popularity of the various militant groups. To most uniformed men, and to Krishna Rao, all militants were anti-national elements and the insurgency's strength was measured in the numbers of shots fired and explosions reported. The army was trained to see no greys and most of its younger officers were impressed at that stage with the blinkered worldview of Hindutva. To the majority of soldiers in that phase, every Kashmiri Muslim was an anti-national element.

The Border Security Force, Saxena's sword arm, which had had a grip on intelligence and operations by the end of 1992, wrapped itself in muck by going berserk when militants grabbed a light machine gun from a bunker in Sopore in early 1993. Scores were killed and much of downtown Sopore gutted in the ensuing mayhem. That was one reason for Saxena's departure a couple of months later. Now the Border Security Force was restricted largely to the city, and the Central Reserve Police Force to standing guard at officials' gates, while the army ruled the roost. The governor even told the state chief

secretary to call on the corps chief of staff, two and a half protocol steps below him, to take instructions.

The corps commander during 1993 and 1994 was another general who wanted to win a war. So, as Kashmir recoiled in horror from the Jamaat holding it ruthlessly under its assertive thrall, it felt the sharp pain of the army's stick behind it. One day, the roof of a white, obviously official, car was hit with a long, heavy staff swung by a soldier from the back of an army lorry. The soldier thought the car had not given the lorry enough space to pass. In that car was Zaki, who as the security adviser chaired the unified headquarters that was supposed to coordinate the operations of the army and other forces. With him was the additional chief secretary, home. But the army was unabashed. It had to guard against ambushes. Cars that did not get off the road as soon as they saw an army vehicle approaching had to be grateful if their occupants were not thrashed.

Ashok Patel had been dispatched to Delhi after the fiasco at Sopore and the Border Security Force, its operations now less precisely focussed, began to show that it was no less macho than the army. Children were slapped as their identity cards were checked. The white beard of a retired deputy superintendent of police was yanked as he was pulled out of his house at Zakura on the road from Srinagar to Manigam. Even the vice chancellor was made to squat on the lawns with everyone else while the university was searched.

In an environment in which human rights got short shrift, certain soldiers and even some officers were brutal.

Qazigund, the first major town on the road into the valley, was not the back of beyond. On 15 May 1994, two soldiers called an ambulance driver out soon after dinner to demand a nurse. When he refused to fetch one at that hour, they dragged him to the street, wound a muffler round his mouth, tied his hands and ordered him not to move. Then they returned to his house and raped his wife. When a neighbour tried to stop them, they beat and tied him up.

At Ladigan village, a Rashtriya Rifles company gang-raped women, ranging from the pubescent to the aged, at dawn on 12 August 1994.

A major of 2 Rashtriya Rifles persistently harassed Rehana, an MSc student near Verinag, taking her into a forest for four hours and imprisoning her father when he refused to marry her to the major.

Muneera of Kalaroos told a designated judge that officers of the same battalion gang-raped and tortured her.

At Kupwara, an army unit killed bystanders at random after its commanding officer was killed during a siege. Among others, Ghulam Mohammed, MSc botany, was dragged from the mosque and shot on the street.

The 7 Rajputana Rifles battalion was accused of several custodial killings, including Ghulam Mohammed Dar of Heevan on 22 June 1994 and Ali Zaman Khan of Bijhama on 26 August 1994.

That the Hindutva mentality had crept into one of the most professional fighting forces in the world became evident when, on 9 February 1995, Veerana Aivalli, the inspector general of police in charge of intelligence, filed a report: a major with military intelligence had been inquiring about the communal and Pakistani inclinations of Zaki. That major had questioned the patriotism of a former corps commander who had chosen to personally lead his troops on a flag march through downtown Srinagar so that the Indian state could retake control in October 1990.

Not just that, his foolhardy zeal to combat militancy had almost killed him in January 1991. Militant boys in a lone room on top of a knoll that dominated every approach had defied a company of Gurkha soldiers since the previous day. The Gurkhas had a Carl Gustaf rocket launcher but only one 3.5 mm shell. When they fired, it only shook the room and raised a lot of dust. Zaki as corps commander had driven down to investigate why the road to the far south was blocked. Impatient at the impasse he found at the knoll, he crawled up to the room on his stomach, getting right under a window undetected. However, the boys inside fired as he rose over the sill to lob a grenade in. Before the grenade finished them, a bullet nicked a lens of his spectacles, made a hole in his balaclava and scratched his head.

Having lived like a rat during the couple of years when the Hizb ruled, Ali Sheikh's darting eyes had by 1994 spotted a glimmer of hope. Krishna Rao's unflagging pressure for more troops had brought a Border

Security Force camp to a hatchery deserted in 1990 by Pandi
outskirts of Haripora, the village just beyond Manigam.

Its officers spent their early cordon-and-search ope
groping in the dark but a few months later, Ali Sheikh's chee
a smug gleam. He had caused a 'crackdown'. Stopping his
next to a Border Security Force soldier at the end of the Woyl
down the road, he had whispered conspiratorially that eigh
boys lived in Manigam and that their leader slept daily in a
not far from his. He had followed up with a visit to the
slipping in from the forests behind it. There, on a little
like the ones used in schools, he had drawn a map of the ro
that house.

Ali Sheikh hated the insolent Hizb area commander, who
in that house with a woman barely out of her teens. She was m
to someone else but preferred the pleasures of being with tho
powerful man in the village. Having learnt from the hysterical b
they faced when they had cordoned places like Batmaloo by day
in the early days, the forces now laid cordons in the dead of night
Border Security Force moved into Manigam between 2 and 3 a.m
after an announcement over the mosque loudspeaker, all the vil
men trickled blearily into the school compound.

Ali Sheikh was there too, for of course no one must know this
his doing. As he glowed, thinking the Hizb man must be yelling u
the soldiers' blows by now, some boys—young enough not to be pe
with the men—scampered in to say he had escaped. Sure tha
soldiers standing guard would never understand a word of Kashm
they whooped excitedly that the forces had accepted the false n
on his identity card.

Kashmir, as Aftab had discovered, had no stomach for th
battles now but its resentment against absorption into a larger nati
which had crystallized into an anti-India rebellion during the 198
remained strong. As Krishna Rao focussed on numbers rather th
sophistication, Kashmir viewed the armed forces with terror, as
occupying enemy. Also, many across its villages had made peace w
the Jamaat—building vested interests in the Hizb's contin
domination, sometimes as lucrative and certainly more powerful th
the influence Ali Sheikh had had in the past.

en, Ali Sheikh nudged his son-in-law to follow, whispering as
de their way through the milling villagers. Go and tell the soldiers
ridge, he said. Tell them they have the right man and must not
go. When the soldiers standing guard stopped his son-in-law at
e of the compound, Ali Sheikh bustled up, saying loudly that
d to water their field. One of the soldiers, recognizing Ali Sheikh
his surreptitious visit to the camp, waved his son-in-law through.
om the bridge, a message was radioed to the village and the
chief was stopped just as he was walking away, his false identity
nestling in his pocket. Making him stand where he was, the
r in charge beckoned a villager and told his men to beat him.
n the villager began to yell for mercy, the officer waved his men
op. Gruffly, he asked who the man standing in front was. He did
now, the man whimpered, but yelled his name soon after the
ers went back to thrashing him.
The Hizb man was shot on the spot.
After that, Ali Sheikh visited the commandant every now and
, furtively carrying boxes of fruit and nuts.

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Sheikh's niece was large and she had gout, but she flew through
door like a tornado. Hysterical and breathless, she could barely
k. Her husband and sons had been to visit Ali Sheikh several
s over the past few days to ask for help. Although he had promised
o his utmost, he had done nothing. This was the same niece whose
band had stood by Ali Sheikh in the Jamaat's kangaroo court,
gratitude was not one of Ali Sheikh's virtues. A focussed eye on
main chance had always kept him ahead and association with a
maat-affiliated family had by this stage become a disadvantage.
Fortunes had reversed in rural Kashmir. It was living a new
htmare, except that victims of the nightmare that had lasted from
1 to 1993, such as Ali Sheikh, were quite enjoying this one. The new
tims were those for whom the previous nightmare had been a dream
me true. Ali Sheikh's niece, for instance, had flourished then, earning
ney and prestige from the school her husband and elder son ran.
w they cowered in terror. They had had a visitor a few days earlier,

a handsome young Gujjar called Bahadur Khan, who abducted her husband and son. Bahadur had come a long way. Having run errands for the JKLF as a boy, trained with Al Barq and fought Indian forces, he now worked for those forces.

That switch might seem weird but it had become a pattern. It began when, quite soon after Krishna Rao began to throw India's armed might at Kashmir by the battalion, an extraordinarily resourceful Dogra Rashtriya Rifles officer was posted near Sonawari, halfway from Manigam to Sopore. Full of empathy, he had heard frank accounts of how Kashmiris were suffering and what they wanted. He soon had a better insight into the situation than his peers or seniors.

The army brass okayed his proposal to employ disillusioned militants as mercenaries against the Hizb—though some, including Zaki, opposed the idea. The officer took over a gang that had already begun to work with the Border Security Force unit that had first got to Sonawari. An illiterate fellow who went by the name of Kuka Parray was its leader. Kuka had once made a living singing and dancing at weddings but had been swept with the tide into militancy—to become a part of Hilal's group. The previous year, a Hizb boy of the area had been smitten by one of Kuka's distant relatives and, when she had refused his advances, Hizb boys had abducted and raped her. Furious, Kuka had turned his guns on the Hizb and, when the going got tough, had turned to Indian forces for help.

Other such mercenary bands followed suit and it became a trend over the next couple of years. Bahadur was among the militant commanders that Dogra officer recruited over the next few months. He had been a feisty militant until, jealous of its stronghold around Lar, the Hizb had attacked Bahadur's troupe in the forests above Manigam. Among those killed in that battle had been one of Bahadur's cousins.

Once he had the Rashtriya Rifles' 'back', he and his band did pretty much what they pleased. In this corner of the valley, Bahadur could turn up at anyone's house with a dozen boys bristling with automatic weapons. Bursting insolently through the door, he would poke a gun at his victim's chest with a gruff accusation: the man had fed militants the previous summer.

The man could not deny it. Those militants had included Bahadur.

As before, Bahadur's gang squeezed money from the rich and anyone they thought was an enemy of their current cause. The Armed

Forces Special Powers Act meant that as long as the local commander turned a blind eye, agents of the state, especially covert ones, could get away with murder. They did—with loot, rape and murder. At times, soldiers, even the officers who paid the mercenaries 1,500 rupees a month, joined in.

L. Middleton, a British officer that Hari Singh had seconded to investigate allegations against troops during martial law in 1931, had reported that at least one rape was proven and that

> The summary trials which were conducted were necessarily based mainly on information supplied by the police or troops ... In these circumstances, there was rich field for dishonest minor officials to exploit and it would be surprising if no bribery had occurred. The cases mentioned in evidence are allegations not proved but I have no doubt that they are based on fact.

He could have written similar lines sixty-five years later.

When Bahadur and his gang turned up at Ali Sheikh's sister's house one day, he demanded 10,000 rupees after raining a few blows on her eldest son's head. The family paid but, a few days later, he returned to demand another 10,000. That too they paid. When he visited a third time, Ali Sheikh's grand-nephew said plaintively that he only earned a salary of 4,000 rupees. Bahadur was not impressed. Pointing his gun at the young man's chest, he said with a shrug that then he would have to take his life instead.

The terrorized young man said he would arrange something in a day or two and had rushed to Ali Sheikh. But Ali Sheikh, who had already promised to help but had done nothing after his niece's family had visited the previous week, dismissed him with a wave of his hand, saying he should not make such a big issue of it. What could a mere Gujjar do?

Ali Sheikh could have got the Rashtriya Rifles to rein Bahadur in but was chary of frittering the army's goodwill, which he had turned into a lucrative resource. He often reported Jamaat hangers-on to junior officers so that, when they were picked up, their relatives rushed to pay Ali Sheikh—to get him to bustle up to the brigadier and get them released. That way, Ali Sheikh kept the Jamaat as well as the army happy. The brigadier had ordered him locked up when he had discovered

the scam but Ali Sheikh's son-in-law had soon rushed in with a letter from the National Conference general secretary. It said that Ali Sheikh was a loyal worker. So the next time Ali Sheikh visited, the brigadier had asked him to sit, then ordered tea and biscuits.

Wanting to tread carefully after that, Ali Sheikh had tried to keep away from his niece's problems. He realized he had no choice, though, the day she ran into his house, for Bahadur's boys had whisked her husband and son away. Putting on a clean waistcoat, Ali Sheikh made for the Rashtriya Rifles camp, which had been set up a couple of kilometres beyond where the Border Security Force had been.

When Ali Sheikh was ushered into the brigadier's room, he stood respectfully, hands clasped in front of him. How could his relatives possibly pay any more, he asked, before swearing by all that was holy that they had never been militants. It was he who had told them to mix with the Jamaat, he claimed, so that the family could be protected. The brigadier virtually had power over life and death under the special laws. He summoned Bahadur and, after angrily berating him, ordered that Ali Sheikh's relatives be handed to him.

You should not trust these fellows, Ali Sheikh hissed to the brigadier before leaving, for they would turn against him too.

By 1993, Gary Saxena and Ashok Patel had already broken the backs of all of Kashmir's popular militant groups barring the Hizb. Most of those successes were achieved in Srinagar. The battles of the next phase were largely rural, where the Hizb ruled.

It was the infantry, Krishna Rao's strategic choice, which crippled the Hizb during this period. But the methods many of the army units employed—those of an occupation force—during those years, and the depredations of their Ikhwani associates, neutralized the negative impact that the Hizb had earlier made on Kashmir. If the Hizb, along with the Jamaat cadre, had horrified rural Kashmir and created an aversion for Pakistan, the tactics of the Ikhwan bands and those army units resurrected Kashmir's hatred for India.

Still, caught as it was in a pincer, Kashmir was by and large desperate for an end to violence, chaos and lawlessness. Kashmir had not forgotten the trauma, pain and humiliation of the past five years,

though, and the period had revived general awareness about the erosion of Kashmir's conditional accession. It was therefore in a mood for a negotiated settlement with India, a return to self-rule without sovereignty, if only to justify the blood of the tens of thousand who had already died.

Sadly, it had no leaders who could credibly represent it. Had such leaders existed, it would have been a good time to strike a deal. By 1995, Pakistan knew that it held a losing hand. And it had no idea what to make of the utter disregard with which Prime Minister Narasimha Rao treated it—not even showing contempt or anger. Officially, India simply ignored Pakistan during the five years that he was prime minister.

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A Losing Battle

In March 1993, around the time Kashmir's itinerant politicians began to regroup, Aftab returned to Pakistan, using his favourite route, Nepal. He had spent a couple of months in Jammu and Delhi, happy to escape Kashmir's Chille Kalan and, more chilling still, the ignominy of having been ejected as Hizbullah chief after Guga used the Wakhloo abduction to undermine him. But even Jammu had become too hazardous to relax in.

Pakistan by contrast turned out to be an elixir. He was standing in the lobby of a plush hotel, wondering why he had been asked to come there, when he was swept into a dream world. Sardar Attique, the ambitious son of Azad Kashmir's prime minister, Sardar Qayoom, strode confidently in, his dapper bodyguards trailing discreetly. Taking Aftab by the elbow, he led him to a sofa, handing him a mobile phone with a flourish even before they were seated. Aftab was still wide-eyed when Attique fished out a smart key chain and thumped it into his palm. It was the key to a Mitsubishi Pajero, waiting outside. Aftab could not drive but quietly pocketed the keys, his mind whirling.

Attique had been in Dubai but had flown back immediately when told that Aftab had arrived. Aftab was still trying to figure out the next morning why he was being treated like a prince when a wad of 10,000 rupees was delivered to him at the five-star hotel at Margala Hills where Attique had booked a room for him—for his pocket expenses, Attique's secretary said airily when Aftab telephoned to ask.

Attique and his powerful father had invited Aftab to Pakistan this time. Sardar Qayoom had been avuncular towards him when he had spent most of 1990 in Muzaffarabad but the treatment he was now getting was in a different league. It was Qayoom who finally explained when Aftab was taken to see him a few days later. He wanted Aftab

to run a new outfit—Al Mujahid. The reason for this initiative was simple. The new Democratic regime in Washington was happy to push people's rights in places like Kashmir and, since the beginning of 1993, the political patrons of Kashmir's militant groups had become more active. Qayoom did not want to be left out and the best way to get some political thrust was to flap a wing in the jihad. Attique's personal security officer, Colonel Farooq, quietly mentioned that funds were no problem. Thirty to thirty-five million rupees could be arranged.

Aftab was to work with a man from north Kashmir whom Attique had already involved, but he took an instant dislike to the slick, confident man. These people were too focussed on money, Aftab thought, as he mulled the idea night after night. He missed his Hizbullah, with Guga invoking God and Islamic history at every turn and the transcendental satisfaction of sacrificing themselves for the general weal.

He was still undecided when a Saudi Arabian visa turned up—with an invitation to visit the centre of the Muslim world as part of a delegation of Kashmiris. Their hosts were the Jeddah-based Rabita Alami Islami, Muslim World Network. Aftab was thrilled. For the first time, he had a passport in his own name, a Pakistani passport at that. So he flew to Jeddah along with Farooq Rehmani, still president of one of the People's League factions, Ashraf Saraf of the Jamaat and a few others. Salahuddin's favourite, Majid Dar, was the only other militant commander in the group.

They were ushered into the presence of the imam of the Ka'aba. They held discussions in Mina with Muslims from different corners of the world, all invited there by the contact group. They found everyone very sympathetic to the Kashmiri movement. The Pakistani consulate arranged a luncheon meeting with Maulana Bin Bas, the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia. Aftab was the most junior in the group but he eased himself in right next to the chief priest after being introduced. So when the meal was served, he ate from the same platter as the grand mufti, along with Rehmani and Saraf. This was the sort of achievement that still delighted Aftab's boyish mind.

The Kashmiris pleaded earnestly with the mufti to declare a global jihad against India, saying that horrors were being heaped on Muslim women and men in Kashmir by India's forces. The priest listened attentively and after a short silence, looked around at the expectant

faces, to ask whether they had considered the effect that would have on Muslims across the rest of India. Unswerving, the visitors launched into a fresh peroration on the horrors Kashmir was facing. Finally, the mufti asked them to send him a detailed note and promised to consider it. He never did declare a jihad.

On his return to Pakistan, Aftab left straight for Muzaffarabad. He felt more at home there, particularly since he stayed with distant relatives this time. He slipped into a carefree life, chatting happily with his cousin, a year or two younger than he. The two of them would often take evening drives in the SUV Attique had given Aftab or in the family Toyota.

Time slipped by until, several months later, his idyllic life was interrupted by a phone call. It was Attique, summoning him to Kashmir House, Sardar Qayoom's impressive office. Aftab tensed as he drove up. A row of Pajeros was parked outside and scores of large gunmen stood in knots around the vehicles. Inside, Attique introduced him to a dozen burly Afghans. Most of their beards were streaked with grey but they rose to warmly embrace Aftab. Attique half bowed when he introduced the brother of Burhanuddin Rabbani, the mujahideen commander who had won the race to become Afghanistan's president a year earlier.

Some of the Afghans took pictures and one even brought out a smart video camera, for Attique had built Aftab up as a valiant mujahideen commander from Kashmir. Aftab glowed, remembering the days when he had gratefully tagged along with Afghans to get a taste of their glorious jihad. He wished he had brought bodyguards and dressed more elaborately that day. He was wearing an army jacket over his salwar-kameez but was carrying only a pistol stuffed into it.

Lunch was served, and then fruit and tea. On a high, Aftab readily agreed when Attique mentioned that his guests were willing to arrange training in Afghanistan for their new group. Over the next few days, though, Aftab kept having second thoughts. Getting ISI registration had become tough, for a plethora of outfits operating separately in Kashmir did not fit with its increasingly nuanced strategy. Plus, Aftab knew that the ISI did not trust Attique beyond a point—or Sardar Qayoom for that matter. Attique's security chief worked hard to persuade both the ISI and Aftab but Aftab kept stalling.

Over the next few weeks, his mobile phone was withdrawn, then the Pajero too, but he still could not bring himself to take the plunge. He would not admit it but he was afraid to face Kashmir again. His heart was still in the Hizbullah and, though he had managed to forget the ignominy of being sacked, going back would scrape those bruises.

Then, out of the blue, the man who had taken his place as Hizbullah's chief sent a message asking Aftab to meet him in Nepal. He was already there with a couple of other Hizbullah commanders. 'You do not leave me alone even now,' was Aftab's mocking greeting when they met, but he was secretly elated that they needed him. The man was in a fix. He had had enough. It was not easy to run a small group any longer, for the government's grip had become steadily firmer. And when he had tried to go to Pakistan, the ISI had pointed out that Aftab was already there.

Aftab by now had enough contacts in Pakistan to arrange visas, even from Nepal. So the former rivals briefly worked together in Muzaffarabad. Hizbullah's training camp there was a mess because, when he had left in 1991, Aftab had appointed a Kashmiri who had gone there to get his daughter married. With no taste of Guga's zeal, he had embezzled funds and upset trainees. In his depression, Aftab had avoided dealing with the situation but the solution was simple now. The man whom Guga had chosen to replace Aftab took over as camp commander. Aftab could now go back to Kashmir as Hizbullah chief.

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Quite soon after he returned from Pakistan, Aftab found that picking up the pieces of his guerrilla life was a cubist nightmare. If survival had become difficult in the last few months before he had left, it was now almost impossible. Not only had the forces' grip become tighter, Kashmir had turned inimical to its former heroes.

Approaching his home on a rare visit one day in the middle of 1994, he felt a strange buzz. He could not quite put a finger on it but then realized that he seemed to be walking against a tide. Everyone was tensely walking in the opposite direction, avoiding his eyes—even though almost all had known him since he was a little boy. Then

one of his comrades, who had stopped for a moment to talk to someone, whispered that everyone was leaving because they had arrived. A crackdown—the word they used to describe cordon-and-search operations—was inevitable, and would make life hell for another day, or night. Even Batmaloo was tired. Crammed with bunkers, parts of it were searched three times in a single week—from before dawn, in the middle of winter.

Aftab somehow slogged on for another dreary year but then came the hardest cut. His mentor disowned him again. A bunch of Hizbullah boys called a press conference in the inner city to wave a letter signed by Guga, expelling Aftab from the Hizbullah.

Aftab was not ready to throw in the towel, however. The next day he went into the heart of the inner city to meet the men of Al Umar, Mushtaq Zargar's group. The man whom Babar had despised as a lout was in jail but he liked Aftab, and his boys would give their lives for their leader's friend. They helped him organize a press conference, a week after the one at which Guga's letter had been displayed. While Al Umar boys stood guard, Aftab announced the formation of Hizbullah, Shahid-ul Islam group. Now, he was not only chief commander, even the group was named after him. Not that it was much of a group. Hizbullah had been small enough and this one was no more than a fig leaf.

Aftab shifted headquarters to a corner of the old city, an area the forces largely ignored, one moreover that had innumerable alleys for escape. Their insurgency was lacklustre. Even by 1993, the few fresh recruits that were available were barely-whiskered rural boys, a far cry from the city-bred zealots that had helped launch the Hizbullah, the JKLF or the Hizb. By the time 1995 rolled around, even rural boys were hard to find. Money too was a problem. The ISI concentrated on the Hizb now and the majority of the rest got just a pittance. So Aftab's group began to do what others had done four years before. Whenever they heard of a contractor or corrupt officer—and both were legion in those days of chaos—who had made a large sum, they turned up to meet him, gun in one hand, subscription booklet in the other.

They were only taking from the corrupt, the boys would tell each other—and it was India's money after all. Kashmir's favours-for-security version of religiosity had always facilitated mendacity.

The year 1995 was a horrible one for Aftab's family. Until then, only his poor Amma had been really badly affected, though she had never shown it except for retreating into a shell. She had watched her husband dragged into the street, heard the sharp snap of guns being cocked ricocheting around the walls between his pleas that he was an army man too and knew nothing of where his son was. She had watched Rukhsana, her second child, fly out into the street, hair streaming, screaming at soldiers that they could kill her but she would not let them take her father away. And her third child, her Prince, had cringed in pain and fear, placing his sobbing face on a soldier's boot, begging for his life, saying he did not know where his brother was.

By 1995, searches were more frequent and though Abbu and Rukhsana would for years sing the praises of some of the officers who led troops into their house, a few were obnoxious. Either way, it was always nerve-wracking. Rukhsana had once engaged the officers in conversation just outside the main door, shutting it long enough for her younger brother Javed—the only brother other than Aftab to turn militant—to leap cat-like down the stairs and over the wall into the next yard.

As Aftab tried to keep his bedraggled militancy going, adversity forced him to do things he would have preferred not to—just when people were less indulgent than they had been a couple of years ago. That affected Aftab's family too. A large middle-aged woman turned up at their door one day with her young son. Sitting down, she looked woefully at Amma and began to weep. Baffled, Amma turned wide-eyed to Prince but, too self-deprecating to fit his nickname, he was equally bewildered. Finally, he asked the visitor softly what the matter was, but she only wept louder. Her son finally explained: Aftab's group had imprisoned his brother. He was only a shopkeeper, he added, and had done nothing wrong. The woman interrupted her sobs to wail at Amma that she was a mother too and could understand her pain. She must help to get her son back.

Even more bewildered, Amma turned again to Prince. A wiry, soft-spoken boy, Prince was an uncomplaining pillar. He went to Aftab's new inner city hideout that evening, getting off the auto-rickshaw half a kilometre away and looking furtively around before ducking into an alley. People came to the house and the family did not know what to say to them, he told Aftab, his hands nervously turning the air like a fan, his eyes earnest saucers of appeal. But Aftab was unmoved.

'Don't let them come,' he replied, his voice rising in irritation. 'Send them to me. Tell them I am downtown.'

He was not impressed with Prince's description of the woman's distress. Her son had been picked up—and tortured—because he had telephoned the police when a Hizbullah boy had gone to his shop in Lal Chowk. Some Kashmiris had begun voluntarily to help the forces fight militancy and, to Aftab, they were traitors.

Abbu only went to Aftab's hideout once and that was a disaster. It went wonderfully at first, for he was received with great respect when the boys realized he was Aftab's father. One of them ran to call the chief commander. Perplexed but secretly pleased that Abbu could see how respected he was, Aftab sat down in front of him. When one of the boys brought a cup of tea and some cake from a nearby bakery, Abbu first asked deprecatingly why he was going to so much trouble, then blessed the boy by blowing air at him from upraised hands.

Then he came to the point, asking for the Sir Syed Memorial Polytechnic to be reopened. Aftab had ordered the institution shut after someone had complained to him that a few girls were teased during ragging. This sort of action was about as much success groups like Aftab's could now claim, and frustrated commanders grabbed opportunities to show that they still had clout. Agreeing to his father's request might compromise his prestige among his boys, he thought. So Aftab decided to stand firm.

He had forgotten his father's stubborn temper, though, and got a jolt when Abbu abruptly rose and walked out. Aftab scurried after him but the old man would not even turn to say goodbye. Aftab sat hunched silently all evening, smoking one cigarette after another, and barely slept that night. After a couple of days, he telephoned the head of the polytechnic and told him he could reopen.

A few weeks later, it was Aftab's turn to ask a favour and Abbu's to worry about what his colleagues would think. They lived such completely different realities now that Aftab did not realize how much of an embarrassment even his presence at his old school would cause his father. So, when he wanted the nephew of a comrade to be admitted, he strode through the gate, expecting to cause no more of a flutter than a hundred admiring stares from schoolboys. The school was buzzing by the time he reached the main building and, after someone ran into the principal's office, the astounded priest sent for Abbu. Aftab found his father rushing towards him a few moments later. When he reached his son, the proud man, who had revelled in correcting even his officers on points of discipline, took off the blue beret he liked to sport and, bending, placed it at Aftab's feet—begging symbolically with his dignity.

Shocked, Aftab turned on his heel and left. After the principal had given Abbu a piece of his mind, the distraught father retreated into a secluded corner and lit a banned cigarette. While he was smoking, the dizzying buzz in his head got worse and, before he could call for help, he collapsed. The hospital discharged him a couple of weeks after that heart attack but the humiliating pain of the way he felt his life had unravelled would not let him recover. He went into a coma and had to be put on dialysis for months. After that, he never walked. The doctors said he could if he tried but Abbu had lost the will to stand erect.

In hospital once again towards the end of 1995, he decided he was going to die and wanted Rukhsana married before that. She had been engaged to a friend of Aftab's, a man of orthodox views who had dabbled at the edges of the movement before going to Kuala Lumpur for a degree in mass communication. He was back now and Abbu became dogged: the wedding had to be completed.

He got his way but that turned out to be another trauma for the family. Aware that the forces would sharpen their vigil as soon as they heard there was a wedding in the house, the family told the neighbours they were cleaning and decorating for a ritual by pirs to pray for Abbu's recovery. Even the feast was cooked at another house—a small feast, for only three men were going to come with the groom.

Nevertheless, on the wedding day, there was a cordon. A young officer came to the door, a smile playing on his lips. Where is the bride, he asked. Throwing a shawl around her shoulders, Rukhsana flew down the stairs, asking what bride he was talking of. There was no wedding, she yelled shrilly. The officer only looked more amused. Why was she wearing so much jewellery then, he asked softly. Was it a crime to wear jewellery, she shot back, undaunted.

They searched the entire house, and the three adjoining ones, but Aftab was not there. He had opted for caution.

Then the telephone rang. It was the groom's companion. The car in which they had been approaching Dal gate had been stopped near the Tourist Reception Centre not far away and they had been told they could go no further. So they had gone back to Ahdoo's hotel.

A friend of Aftab's drove Rukhsana there and the wedding took place quietly at the hotel. It was getting dark by then and Rukhsana was driven to her new home straightaway, without a feast or any songs of rejoicing.

{26}

Elections

The scene appeared unreal. No triumphant Caesar could have felt more light-headed. Such a wildly cheering flood of humanity surged down the highway that the hour's drive from Anantnag to Srinagar took twelve. Guga had had to force Qazi Nisar to shout 'Shah, shah, Shabir Shah' a few years earlier but today Shabir truly seemed to be the king of Kashmir's heart.

It was October 1994 and Krishna Rao was on the move. He was behind schedule but was still determined to hold elections. Saxena had begun to lay the ground in the spring of 1991 when he released the leaders whom Jagmohan had arrested a year before, and Krishna Rao was now setting free the more high-profile men. Yasin was first, in the summer of 1994, and he joined the Hurriyat after making the JKLF's ceasefire formal. Now it was time for the star to enter the arena. Amnesty International had dubbed Shabir Prisoner of Conscience—Kashmir's Mandela.

Kashmir turned out tumultuously, sure that a messiah had arrived with panacea for its woes. The politicians in the Hurriyat watched dumbfounded, acutely aware that this wave of support for Shabir could wash them aground. Kashmir's rapturous response to his political line, radically different from theirs, surprised them. As soon as he was released, he had toured the Jammu area, reaching out to Hindus there and to Pandits, and speaking inclusively of Ladakh too, before returning to the valley.

The Hurriyat had by now been adopted by Pakistan. The ISI's attitude had changed since 1990, when it had watched unmoved, or pleased, as some of the boys killed Kashmiri political leaders. By the mid-1990s, Kashmir's disenchantment had begun to worry it. Since the 'bleed India' strategy had lost its edge, Pakistan had turned

gratefully to the Hurriyat as the political front it could project to the West as the authentic voice of Kashmir.

The two that Pakistan trusted most at that stage, Geelani and Lone, turned up to meet Shabir on the third morning after he reached Srinagar. Hundreds of fans milled outside but Shabir joined the older men, beaming beatifically. Lone was deferential for once. Referring admiringly to Shabir's announcement that he had come with a needle and thread to stitch back the fabric of Kashmir, he invited him to join the Hurriyat's efforts. They insisted that Shabir go with them right away to meet other senior Hurriyat leaders.

Shabir's friends advised him not to go, warning that it would damage his untarnished stature. But Shabir lacked political sagacity—and had more than his fair share of courtesy. In an attempt at compromise, he agreed to go for just a few minutes. True to his word, Shabir only stayed long enough for a sip of tea at the mirwaiz's ancestral house but by then a hundred cameras had clicked senior Hurriyat leaders warmly shaking his hand.

Shabir did not need to talk to the Hurriyat. He had already made his points from jail—eight of them. Hurriyat's politicians had mulled them unhappily. They could work among the Hindus of Jammu and the Buddhists of Ladakh, even try to wean back Pandits, as he wanted. But they were not going to wind up their separate outfits. That was too much to ask.

Shabir's friends now spoke publicly of the need for a more seasoned leader, one who had been in the thick of Kashmir's struggle for years, to take over as president of a Hurriyat into which all its member outfits merged. The wily old foxes in the executive knew how to play this game. First join us, they told Shabir. Then we will make all the changes you want. By early 1995, callow Shabir was one of the seven on the executive. But he had been inducted in place of the People's League president, a founding member of the Hurriyat executive—a move which deftly ensured that Shabir could never return to his old party.

They cornered him just a few weeks after he joined. Professor orchestrated it. One morning, he took Yasin aside—whom he had been able to talk around to his perspective even when they had decided to plunge into the 1987 elections. At that afternoon's general conference meeting, Professor suggested, they would make a proposal: they should

all accept Shabir's idea and merge their separate parties into Abbas Ansari's. That was a largely defunct group but, since it was named Ittihad-ul Muslimeen, Muslim Unity, nobody could object. Chuckling, Professor added that Shabir would then have what he wanted: one president, one constitution, one flag—an ironic reference to the slogan through which Shyama Prasad Mookerjee had opposed a unique constitutional status for the state. After Professor explained that Shabir would never accept a plan that did not involve his elevation to the Hurriyat chair, Yasin fell in line.

That afternoon's general council meeting was in the large L-shaped room on the first floor of the new headquarters building that Shabir had purchased for the Hurriyat in well-to-do Rajbagh—using part of the lavish contributions he received. The executive sat in a row against the wall, facing the rest. After some of Shabir's colleagues had spoken, making their points again about merging under the leadership of an experienced campaigner, Professor took the floor. He held forth, first on how the trend worldwide was towards democracy, which meant plurality of views and parties. Then he said that since Shabir sahib wanted them to merge their separate group identities and they could not ignore what he wanted, he proposed that they should merge their groups with Ansari's. Ansari could be their president. Shabir sat dazed but Naeem Khan, who had once chaired the Islamic Students' League, leapt up. He and Shabir had become close during the years they had spent together in jail and Naeem was now Shabir's right hand. Agitatedly, Naeem said that this was not what they had been talking about.

What they had been talking about, however, was dead now.

Personal ambitions, packaged like Shabir's proposal as being in the best interests of the movement, were generally too ambivalently presented to get anywhere. The Hurriyat remained moribund through the rest of the 1990s, barely managing to paper over such rifts, never able to take any position beyond the one it had settled on after months of wrangling: the right to self-determination. They did not even all agree on whose right, within which physical boundaries, they were speaking of. The mirwaiz, secretly wary of Pakistan, insisted on all the people of the state Hari Singh had once ruled. So did Geelani, though his commitment to accession to Pakistan—albeit conditional—

remained firm. Professor, on the other hand, was intent on the Chenab as a border, hoping for some version of the Dixon Plan or the one Abdullah had taken to Pakistan.

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Atal Behari Vajpayee was one of India's most experienced politicians. A successor of Balraj Madhok, the firebrand Jana Sangh leader of the 1960s, but also an admirer of Nehru, Vajpayee had earned respect across the political spectrum. As leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, he was leader of the Opposition now but Prime Minister Narasimha Rao treated him as a friend and ally, even dispatching him—with Farooq Abdullah in tow—to defend India's case on Kashmir at the United Nations Human Rights Commission. And when the need to organize elections in Jammu and Kashmir became more urgent by the end of 1995 (there had been no assembly for five years and repeatedly extending governor's rule was both cumbersome and embarrassing), the prime minister counted on Vajpayee's help again.

Narasimha Rao was intent on getting Shabir rather than the entire Hurriyat to contest elections. Together, the group was seen as hawkish and New Delhi had been impressed by Shabir's statements of solicitude for Pandits and the state's other non-Muslims—and by the reception Kashmir had given Shabir after his release in 1994. Since it would have been impolitic for Shabir to meet the prime minister or even the governor, he was persuaded to meet Vajpayee.

With Vajpayee was the erudite Jaswant Singh, the Bharatiya Janata Party's most urbane face. With Shabir was Abdullah Tari, who had kept Kashmir's Jamiat-e-Ahle-hadis away from politics while he was its amir in the early 1990s. He was now Shabir's constant companion.

The visit to a man of such prominence as Vajpayee was a red-letter day for Tari and he would remember every detail of that meeting for years. Dozens of party MPs were milling about the lawns outside Vajpayee's bungalow on New Delhi's Raisina Road when they arrived, but Shabir and he were ushered straight into the drawing room. Vajpayee received them warmly, speaking expansively of how Shabir's name was everywhere, in the newspapers, on television. I have been hearing your name for years, he said.

Shabir promptly reciprocated, saying he had been hearing of Vajpayee since he was a boy—whenever he could get a newspaper in

jail. He knew, he added, that India's relations with Pakistan had been at a peak when Vajpayee was India's foreign minister—way back when Morarji Desai was prime minister in 1977. He had come to seek Vajpayee's advice, he then said—courteous obliquity being de rigueur. Twenty, twenty-five, even more, people were killed in Kashmir every day, he said, although it was such a little place, a small part of India. Was that a good thing?

After a moment's silence, Shabir pressed on, telling Vajpayee that if he were to speak in Parliament, it would carry weight. If Vajpayee were to say, perhaps, that we understand your point, but we have some other perspectives. We accept that it is an issue but let us agree to freeze it for some time, so that we can resolve it at the proper time . . . As Shabir trailed off, Tari watched wide-eyed but their host sat quiet for a while, one soft cheek resting on a fist, elbow propped on the sofa arm. There was a long silence, not even a nod or gesture in response.

When Vajpayee finally spoke, it was to tell Shabir to take over the reins of government. He could do what he thought best once he was elected, but Kashmir had to keep a link of a silken thread with India. Otherwise India would break.

A successor of the man whose unbridled rhetoric had driven a schoolboy to rebellion was, three decades on, asking that boy for his nation's future, using a metaphor that Nehru might have used. His party stood for a one-dimensional India but Vajpayee understood, at least as a fact of realpolitik, that India could not survive without a multi-cultural identity.

A feverish game of chess was now under way as elections with the participation of a part of the Hurriyat became the measure of success or failure on every side. Pakistan and Geelani were determined to prevent it. Amarjit Dulat, the Intelligence Bureau man who had dealt with Kashmir since before he accompanied Moosa on that nightmarish flight a few hours after Rubaiya had been abducted, had already begun to prepare the ground for Shabir. He got a bunch of former commanders led by Babar, once Shabir's closest acolyte, to agree to contest elections.

But Babar fell out with Shabir and, soon after Shabir's quiet meeting with Vajpayee, Babar and four other former commanders went to publicly meet the home minister, S.B. Chavan. Among them was Imran Rahi, the man whom Salahuddin had once persuaded not to accept Nasir's order to become chief commander of the Hizb.

Some Hurriyat leaders were flabbergasted, having positioned themselves since 1990 as negotiators. Lone willingly became Pakistan's instrument: he roared that the five were traitors. He was not just rooting for Pakistan. Not only was his long-standing dream of ruling slipping away, the Indian intelligence moves made him personally insecure. The brother of one of the five was his leading political opponent in the north and the militant grapevine insisted that another, the Pahari advocate Bilal Lodhi, had launched Al Barq at Lone's instance but then fallen out over how Lone disbursed ISI funding.

Despite these shenanigans, scores of other militants waited in the wings while the five former commanders met India's home minister. And in the valley, hundreds more were ready to join. The Intelligence Bureau was even told that Majid Dar, Salahuddin's right hand, wanted to return across the Line of Control and talk. Majid loved his beautiful second wife and she had had enough of being away from home.

But nobody would stand publicly with the five until it was clear that they had 'back', that they would have power. Lone's denunciation could be a sentence of death, for those who carried guns were happy to target anyone dubbed an enemy of the cause, an agent of the government.

The large florid man liked to fish and he was thoroughly enjoying this trip. He was in an angler's paradise, sitting by a stream in Dachigam, Kashmir's finest reserved forest. Huge rainbow trout and brown trout seemed to be leaping at his hook.

The angler's name was Frank Wisner and he was the US ambassador to India. His words regarding Kashmir over the past few months had been music to Delhi's ears. But that was not the only reason why shoals of fish from the breeding farms of the state's fisheries department had been flung into the Dachigam stream for him to catch. For the US, Kashmir was now just a pawn in a far bigger game.

It was all about weapons. The two countries were trying to lull each other with pretended affection so that whichever managed to trip the other could affect distressed innocence. Having won the world's first remote-controlled war in the Persian Gulf in 1991, US strategists figured that world dominance would be easy—without body bags—

so long as satellites, missiles and of course nuclear warheads could be limited to allies. Since nothing could be done about Russian and Chinese weapons, that put India sharply in focus.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which had taken effect in 1970 for twenty-five years, had just been extended in perpetuity. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao was keenly aware that the US would soon move forcefully to reverse India's nuclear weapons programme unless India defiantly became openly nuclear. Having developed technology for non-explosive computer tests, the US had mooted a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty almost as soon as the NPT had been extended. Once that took effect, India's window of opportunity would shut. For, although India too had the technology for computer tests, it needed data from at least one substantial round of explosive tests.

So Narasimha Rao had ordered nuclear tests in December 1995. But under intense pressure from the US, including a veiled threat to fund his opponents in the coming elections, he called off the tests three days before the set date. Presuming that either he or his friend Vajpayee would be prime minister after the elections, he reasoned that the tests could safely be postponed till the early summer of 1996.

Wisner, having spent much of 1995 trying to prevent India from conducting nuclear tests, had in the bargain discovered the ills of terrorism and had told everyone that democracy was a great idea, that the Hurriyat must plunge into elections. He had even gone to Pakistan's Command and Staff College at Quetta to advise Pakistanis to take 'a fresh look at your assumptions so that you can arrive at new conclusions'. It was the first time the US had tilted against Pakistan on this issue since 1949, when it had taken the lead role in the US–UK axis.

Pakistan was incensed. So was Geelani. And the Hurriyat, shaken by the murder of Professor's elder brother by the Hizb in October 1995, fell in line behind Geelani—all except Shabir. The man who could be king chose to meet the ambassador after he was done fishing. Shabir also responded to a request to meet V.P. Singh, the man who was prime minister when Rubaiya had been abducted.

There was pandemonium at the next Hurriyat executive meeting. Lone, who had dreamed of being king when Shabir was just a flag-burning lad in jail, led the charge and a shouting match ensued. Shabir kept away from the next couple of meetings, sending Naeem Khan

to do battle. After a few weeks, Naeem too stopped going and the Hurriyat announced it had expelled Shabir. Mirwaiz Umar, a little grown up now that he was twenty-one, was still in the chair. He held off the expulsion for a week but stopped short of rocking the boat. His widowed mother taught discretion.

Many of the Hurriyat leaders wanted desperately by then to pull Kashmir out of the cycle of violence but none of them had the gumption to say what he thought. They feared Geelani, who controlled the Hizb's guns. Two of the seven executive members, Professor and Abbas Ansari, had at one point met senior state government officials but the assassination of Professor's brother by the Hizb put paid to that initiative. Professor would not dare for another seven years to stray from the path pointed by Geelani—although his bitterness surfaced often enough. When the time for prayers came while the executive was meeting at the mirwaiz's house a few weeks after his brother's murder, Professor left the room when Geelani took the place to lead. After praying separately on the lawn outside, he told Geelani plainly that he would not pray behind him. Sitting beside Geelani's deputy at another meeting, he said that the fact he was sitting beside his brother's killer demonstrated his dedication to the Kashmiri cause.

Professor no doubt felt he had displayed some courage in saying that much but it did not matter to Geelani or the ISI. Politically, they had turned him into a puppet. More important, Shabir Shah was out of the political reckoning. His meeting with Frank Wisner had been the kiss of death. Perhaps the entire situation would have been less complicated if the US–UK axis had stayed out from the beginning. For the changed US stance did not really help India. Nor did it hurt Pakistan much. It only provided zealots in Kashmir political opportunities.

A visit to the prime minister is like getting past a siege. Cars are stopped beyond the iron barricade on the road outside the first bungalow, the one for security, and after the visitors are frisked, special white cars sweep them down the drive past a lawn that is like a carpet to the second bungalow, the official residence.

Farooq Abdullah alone was ushered down the path to the third bungalow, which was designated the residence although the private residence was beyond. His colleagues stayed behind at the official residence, 7 Race Course Road. Farooq was frowning by this time, his large shoulders hunched. The prime minister was frowning too, habitually grouchy. Neither liked the other—naturally, they were a study in contrasts—and the tension came in handy as each steeled himself. Only a few weeks had passed since Vajpayee's overture to Shabir but he had proved too timid to respond, and the five former militant commanders' move had fizzled amid mistrust soon after their high-profile meeting with the home minister. So both Farooq and Rao knew that this was a crucial round of negotiations. Each hoped the other would blink first.

The prime minister's opening gambit was bold. Had Farooq accepted the supreme court judge, he asked. They had not even discussed it, Farooq replied evenly. Arbitration by a supreme court judge was a new proposal from Narasimha Rao's government. It was meant to break the stalemate in the negotiations being held over the past year.

First, Farooq's nominee, Mohiuddin Shah, had talked with G. Parthasarthy, the gentleman who had represented Indira Gandhi when Beg had represented Farooq's father. They were supposed to hammer out a fresh agreement, on the terms for the younger Abdullah to return to office and try to convince his people that he had obtained adequate concessions from New Delhi to justify their insurrection. But Parthasarthy died before an agreement could be sealed. Then some of Farooq's colleagues put together a paper. Gary Saxena, the former governor, had dealt with them at the government's behest but New Delhi had not liked their paper—which sought essentially to revive what Abdullah had wrested in 1952. Narasimha Rao might have given much of that to Shabir but would not go all the way, and certainly not for Farooq. He did not believe Farooq had enough popularity to carry his people that they might eschew the ongoing violence in response to a deal.

The government tried to wear Farooq and his colleagues down, making them cool their heels while telling them repeatedly that the prime minister would meet them soon. During that long wait, Dulat visited Farooq one night to suggest that the National Conference

paper be given to a supreme court judge for a decision. But it was a political issue that needed to be discussed, Farooq replied, demurring. A couple of days later, he had got the call: the prime minister was ready to see him.

Now a new paper was placed in front of him in the prime minister's presence. His frown deepened after a cursory look; he did not think his colleagues would accept it. When the colleagues were brought across from the next bungalow and confirmed that, the prime minister became grouchier. They did not realize how much pressure there was on his time, he complained. People were waiting and his flight had already been delayed. The prime minister was to fly to Burkina Faso.

Farooq was unfazed. He asked for the 1952 position to be restored through an ordinance that Parliament could later ratify. Rao instructed the home ministry to look into the possibility and left. The home ministry said it could not be done. Farooq's advisers told him it could.

Actually, it was a lot to accomplish through such a legislative short cut: restoring the titles of prime minister and sadr-e-riyasat, reversing the applicability of most Parliamentary laws, excluding the election commission and the comptroller and auditor general from the state, as well as the appellate role of the supreme court.

Since time was running out, the prime minister delivered a televised address at Burkina Faso—to the Indian nation. 'The sky is the limit,' he said, for what the government was willing to discuss with anyone who contested elections in Kashmir and won. The sky under India's constitution, of course, he later told Parliament.

It was a double-edged message, meant for Shabir as much as Farooq, but neither responded.

✣

The antennae of a huge jamming device rose ominously from a white Ambassador car with black windows. A score of white bulletproof vehicles with number plates sans numbers bristled with stony men in black dungarees, automatic weapons at the ready, eyes scanning every window and alley. Farooq stood on the steel sidebar attached to one of the cars and spoke ardently into the little mike in his hand. His theme was autonomy, of the sort the state had had in 1953.

Not a bird fluttered in the eerie stillness of Anantnag's main plaza but people listened from behind shuttered windows—even, just

a stone's throw away, in the home of Qazi Nisar, who had galvanized south Kashmir for the Muslim United Front in 1987. The qazi of course was not there. Hizb boys had picked him up two summers before, in June 1994, soon after he had engaged in covert talks with George Fernandes and Rajesh Pilot. The cleric's body was found lying on the road next morning, fear-filled eyes frozen open, the left half of his plump greying face ripped by a burst of bullets. A girl's hysterical screeching had forced scores of Hizb gunmen to scamper from his grave as his body was interred the next day. They had come there, holding guns aloft, to underline their supremacy, but that lone woman's screech had embodied the voice of Kashmir traumatized.

It had been a potential turning point, for Kashmir had become disillusioned with the Hizb, and therefore Pakistan, by 1993. But by 1994, Krishna Rao had begun to push more and more troops in, and the forces' insensitivity and torture, and their mercenaries' extortion, had by 1996 more or less evened the score: Kashmir could take no more of the violence of both sides.

The cities still resisted the idea of giving up the struggle but rural swathes across the valley had had enough. They ached for *najad*, deliverance from violence, humiliation, extortion, fear. But they dared not say so, not in that plaza where Farooq spoke to shuttered windows, nor in any other public place. Only behind closed doors, in the privacy of hearths, Kashmiris whispered, even to passing Indian journalists since at least 1995: make sure they send the army, let the army take us to the booths so that we can vote. That will bring peace, they would reason, as it had in Punjab.

By the autumn of 1996, when Farooq took the plunge, Kashmir was even willing to talk at city street corners: this '53 position' that Farooq recommended was worth trying. It was not independence, but whatever it was would be something to show for all the blood and trauma. Kashmir's prickly pride could not countenance defeat, and certainly not outright defeat.

Narasimha Rao had lost the 1996 Parliament elections and the new prime minister was a state politician with little experience of national affairs. To him, Kashmir was Farooq. There was little difference between the 'maximum autonomy' the new prime minister vouchsafed and 'the sky is the limit' promise of the previous one, but Farooq liked to go by the feeling in his gut. There were no discussions this time, no papers. He just liked this prime minister's dopey hugs.

Elections for a new assembly were called as soon as Farooq agreed to contest. Of course, Geelani got the Hurriyat to call for a boycott and Shabir dared not defy it. Chary of leaving them in the lurch, the Intelligence Bureau coaxed the former commanders to join Farooq. Babar was willing but the rest fell apart. Babar was negotiating only for himself, they said suspiciously. The hundreds of other former militants who had egged them on the previous winter melted away, afraid of execution.

In October 1996, Farooq finally got the thumping majority he had wanted in 1987 but he had learnt nothing of governance. Within a year or two, the government became a system of patronage for friends, relatives and party workers. Farooq depended on a couple of officers to run the machinery, and they did what they could. But, cocooned in security as the new legislators now were, they were oblivious to the extortion, blackmail, rape and loot that most Kashmiris had to contend with.

To be sure, the new government had begun with good intentions. It appointed an outstanding ombudsman, a woman from south India, to prevent corruption. And it breathed life back into such vital tasks as education and forest protection. During the chaos of the early 1990s, much timber had been felled and Kashmir's mountain wildlife devastated. Classes had been irregular and guns were often brandished in examination halls to silence supervisors. Jobs too were created, even though the government was already overstaffed twice over. But, by the time 1999 came around, those successes had been forgotten. Kashmir now wanted deliverance from Farooq's government. And of course, it blamed the Centre for his government's flaws.

After the decimation of the Hizb by Kashmir's mercenaries, Pakistan had taken to sending in more jihad recruits from Harkat and Lashkar, most of them Pakistani boys. More hardened for battle than the Kashmiri boys of the early 1990s, they sheltered in the mountains more often than in homes. But, as disillusionment with Farooq's government increased, Kashmir began to shelter them once more.

As a road to peace, elections had proved a dead end.

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Cornered

The failure of the 1996 elections as a political initiative was sad. Worse was the failure of those in charge of governance to recognize the social changes that had occurred during, and even through, the militancy. The aspirations that Sheikh Abdullah and Bakshi had unleashed had found new opportunities with the money that flowed freely amid the chaos. People now sought an established system to fulfil those aspirations.

That required dynamic democratic processes and responsive governance. But Farooq did not even understand that democracy craves an opposition. He took Iftekhar, the Shia from the Congress, into his cabinet and made Hari Singh's grandson and the Gujjar pir's great-grandson junior ministers, and he thought he had a stable polity sewn up. A secular, multi-ethnic, democratic polity cannot come from trying to control different communities through feudal chieftains, for their power is rooted in the status quo. Self-preservation requires them to prevent egalitarian prosperity.

Other than Farooq's National Conference, elections had sounded like an opportunity only to the mercenaries who worked with the army. The security adviser—Zaki's successor—had even suggested to his colleagues that Kuka Parray, the folk dancer-turned-militant-turned-mercenary, could be the next chief minister. That was a bad bet but Bahadur Khan, the scourge of Manigam, was among the few who did represent new aspirations. He was one of the most ambitious among the mercenaries—although in the wrong time among the wrong people. He put himself up as a candidate. But, for that constituency, Farooq had nominated the great-grandson of the Gujjars' most revered pir—grandson of the man who had organized an ox fight for Nehru. The family had inherited a vast estate and the offerings that Gujjars

from across the state still brought daily. The pir's scion won and, taking umbrage at Bahadur's temerity, ensured that the new brigadier turned against Bahadur. Too proud to accept humiliation—and the venality of the new brigadier, who was a disgrace to his uniform—Bahadur joined the Hizb and went back across the Line of Control. There, he would remain one of the most important commanders from the valley for at least another decade.

At that stage, the army really did not know what to do with the mercenaries, and did not care. Resting easy, now that the objective of at least the past year—elections—had been accomplished, it was oblivious to the danger posed by the Frankenstein it had created in order to fight the Hizb. Loyal sycophants among the mercenaries were happily used for all kinds of dirty work. Others were dropped like hot potatoes, to survive as best they could among the many enemies they had made.

Ill-equipped for an honest living, many of them continued what they had done as militants and mercenaries—to squeeze what they could through extortion, even ransom. That of course alienated Kashmir further from India, still seen as their patron. Meanwhile, their abandonment—often to be slaughtered by the Hizb—alienated their relatives, neighbours and others who had tilted towards India in the fight against the Hizb and the Jamaat.

Short cuts are attractive in such tough battles but means, as Mahatma Gandhi pointed out, are as important as ends. A blinkered focus on meeting targets and constructing a saleable public relations argument had led India to fritter away the advantage that Pakistan's equally blinkered mistakes had given it in the early 1990s.

Things were really bleak, not only for Kashmir's former militants but even for those like Aftab who remained in the field. Now that the ISI was using the Pakistan-based transnational groups, Lashkar and Harkat, more than before, Kashmiri militants were caught between the devil and the deep sea. Still smarting from Hizbullah's rejection and Abbu's illness, Aftab had withdrawn to Pakistan some months before the elections, and retreated to relatives and friends in Muzaffarabad.

He was enveloped by despair. Muzaffarabad would never be home. It was too small for his ambitious mind. He turned desperately to alternatives. Rukhsana's husband had spoken highly of Malaysia and the quality of education at Kuala Lumpur. So Aftab decided to try and get a master's degree in law there. He could then refashion a life for himself, even in exile—as a teacher perhaps.

He decided that the ISI owed him a passage to Malaysia. But the ISI had other concerns. The brigadier who had taken over Kashmir operations was kind and cooperative but a stickler. Whenever Aftab went to see him, he fished out records of the number of weapons issued to the Hizbullah, and asked for cash accounts. One Hizbullah commander had vanished more than a year earlier with more than a million rupees. Now Aftab had to account for it.

Having no answer, Aftab switched to the offensive. What did the ISI have in mind for Kashmir, he asked with a touch of insolence.

The movement would go on, the brigadier replied. Almost as an afterthought, he added: 'Your problem is you are a political orphan.'

That hit Aftab like a slap, though the brigadier was only trying to explain the new realities. They were harsh realities, and not of his making. The ISI needed political faces to give the desperately struggling movement respectability. Elections had been held and the West was talking glowingly of democracy, tilting towards India.

Aftab, however, was in no state to grapple with reality. Anger surged, and he said through clenched teeth: 'I am sorry. I forgot to bring a letter from Farooq Abdullah.' His depressed mind exaggerated the rebuff and he declared dramatically that Shahid-ul Islam would never raise the gun again. Referring to the talk he had picked up in Muzaffarabad—that the ISI had paid half a million rupees to a Hindu politician of the state to organize a conference—he spoke bitterly of the sacrifices gunmen like himself had made for Pakistan, and of Rukhsana's wedding and Abbu's heart attack.

The brigadier sent for mutton and chicken patties and pots of tea and tried to sweet-talk Aftab through the rest of the evening, but his remark had stung Aftab's raw psyche deeply. He clutched at a chance a few days later when he bumped into the People's League man at whose tea stall the boys used to meet in the mid-1980s. Through him, Aftab got in touch with Shabir Shah, and was delighted when

his cousin spoke affectionately over the telephone, telling Aftab to come home.

Jumping to the conclusion that he was being offered a position of leadership in the new political group his cousin had launched, Aftab faxed a press release from Nepal—his usual route—to the *Kashmir Times* office, announcing that Shahid-ul Islam had given up militancy. It was the last time he used a Hizbullah letterhead.

His bruised mind had overestimated Shabir's words of reassurance, though. Shabir had no more plan for him than he had had in 1989. Aftab expected his cousin to announce that the former commander had joined his party but that was unrealistic. A gunman could not leap straight into the political arena. He had to have been released from prison first. Aftab spent the next month waiting in hope, hiding out where he could. It was tough though to find shelter by this time. He even considered sleeping on the streets on some evenings but that was dangerous. Only patrols were out after ten.

Late one evening, he knocked on an old friend's door. The friend was not home and his mother looked fearful when she opened the door a crack. She let him in when she saw the desperation on Aftab's face and, without a word, brought him food and laid out a mattress. Aftab cried that night as he smoked a cigarette after dinner.

Desolate, he turned to his family. His mother's sister, a more spirited woman than his Amma, called the family together and they telephoned Rukhsana in Kuala Lumpur. She first yelled at Aftab for having ruined his life but softened when his broken voice registered. She told him then to go back to Pakistan, for she had arranged a visa for Malaysia. He could stay with her and perhaps study further. The family thought that was a good plan but sadness descended as they realized that Aftab might never be able to return. He must at least celebrate Id with them, they insisted, for it was just a few days away.

A couple of days before Id, Aftab was riding pillion on a scooter past the convent school when a police jeep caught up and forced the scooter to stop. The officer in the jeep had studied law around the same time as Aftab and had recognized him. Aftab was dragged into the back of the jeep and hauled before the superintendent of police. The officer asked him to sit and gave him a cup of tea, telling him he must be popular, for several media persons had already called to ask if he had been arrested.

Several police and intelligence officers interviewed Aftab over the next few days and he was put through his share of torture. Torture could be vile, for psychological pain, including sexual humiliation, was as much a part of it as physical pain. Stripped, a man's arms were bound to a beam high off the ground, to hang there for an eternity of tearing shoulders. With that came abuse and derision. Electric shocks to genitals were commonplace. Worse was a stick dipped in chilly paste or petrol shoved into an exposed anus. Sometimes, the end of the stick was covered with cloth or rubber, sometimes not. Men were laid naked on ice while wooden rollers ran back and forth over their legs. The army often got what it wanted by pouring buckets of water over a face wrapped in towels. That created the sensation of drowning. Other forces were less sophisticated. The most ruthless was the Special Task Force of the state police and, as among the militants, the most gruesome torturers—and executioners—were often Kashmiris.

After fifty-five days at an interrogation centre, Aftab was shifted back to a police station and finally charged under the Public Safety Act, the all-purpose provision for detention without trial. Until then, he had, on paper, not been in custody. He bathed and carefully combed his hair the day a Doordarshan television team came from Delhi to interview him—it was time now for the government to exhibit its prize catch, a chief commander at least in name. It was only on the second Id, two and a half months after he had been detained, that he finally saw his family. His mother came with Rukhsana, Prince and a younger sister. (Few Kashmiri detainees ever asked to see their fathers, only mothers or sometimes brothers.) The family sat on the grass outside the police station and ate from the large parcel of food they had brought.

Aftab's friends at the bar had been busy. They had filed two missing person's reports soon after his detention, in different police stations. One gave his name, the other the name on the false identity card he had been carrying. The high court issued a habeas corpus order. After his arrest was registered, papers were drawn up to shift him to a jail in Kathua at the farthest end of the Jammu region. Aftab threatened the jailor, saying he would hunt him down even after he retired if he carried out the order. And Aftab's father tried to get some friends in the National Conference to keep his son in the city. None of that turned out to be necessary, for his lawyer friends got a

judge to quash his detention under the Public Safety Act. And they got him bail in the case under the Arms Act.

That only sent Aftab's mind flitting to opportunity. He asked some of the political leaders who were also in jail or came to visit—Guga and Abdul Ghani Lone—whether it might not be better to remain in jail a while, so that he could build an image for a political career. They told him not to be a fool. The government was showing a relatively lenient face but that might not last. As for his family, they would not hear of such gimmickry. Everyone wanted to be together again.

Aftab went home in the spring of 1998, able to stay at home openly for the first time in almost a decade. He had broken the trap.

Like many of Kashmir's militants, Aftab's perspectives had changed during the years of insurgency. He had begun with Guga's pan-Islamist ideas and his own commitment to Kashmir's integration with Pakistan, both shaped by the hatred for non-Muslims that the Hindu names on the lists of those admitted to study medicine in the early 1980s had sparked. So disillusioned had he become with Pakistan and violent jihad by the end of the 1990s, however, that the son of his father's Pandit friend in Jammu now became his closest friend. When Aftab got married in 2002, his friend's Hindu wife ran Aftab's family's kitchen.

Economic frustrations, combined with provocation from men like Balraj Madhok had pushed Kashmir towards the monocultural, religious template of identity around 1967. Head scarves had become more common and social interaction with Pandits had decreased by the 1980s, when events in Iran and Afghanistan reinforced Islamic identity. But reaction against the years of Hizb and Jamaat's rural dominance in the early 1990s reversed that trend. By the turn of the millennium, Kashmir was back to its imperial template—its desire to dominate the rest of the former Dogra kingdom. But much of Kashmir was also by then searching for an alternative template to fit in to a postmodern communication age.

Ironically, the violence of the 1990s had pushed more Kashmiris than ever before to live in various parts of India, and beyond—in places like Kathmandu. Some at least were beginning to appreciate the open-ended inclusive template upon which India had been founded.

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Wasted Opportunities

Around the time Aftab was released from jail in the spring of 1998, Vajpayee became prime minister of India. He had enjoyed running the foreign ministry in Desai's government and dealing with Pakistan and Kashmir were among his chief priorities. He was more inspired by the vision of South Asia's various peoples building a common future than by the exclusivist vision of his colleagues who conflated ethnicity with religion. Policy-wise, it was almost as if Nehru was back in power, for Vajpayee tried strenuously to build friendship with Pakistan even while he tried to persuade Kashmir's independence-minded leaders to negotiate. So keen was his desire that he might have succeeded, but fate was not kind to him. Over the next few years, the daredevil tactics of a politically ambitious Pakistan Army officer would sorely test Vajpayee's resolve.

To begin with, friendship with Pakistan had to be put on hold while Vajpayee dealt with the threat to India's nuclear programme. The game that India and the US had been playing when the US ambassador had gone fishing in Kashmir had been suspended but was not over. A disparate coalition had taken power in 1996, when Narasimha Rao had calculated that either he or Vajpayee would as prime minister test India's nuclear weapons; those tests had been put on hold. So the first thing Vajpayee did, in the second week of May 1998, was to test India's nuclear devices.

Vajpayee's colleagues spent the next couple of weeks provoking Pakistan to expose its stockpile too and, bristling with Punjabi machismo, it did. India had only wanted to bring Pakistan's weapons out of the closet. The Indian tests had not been motivated by belligerence against Pakistan. In fact, nuclear weapons neutralized India's military superiority over Pakistan. If India still needed them, it was because

they had become the currency of power in a world of remote control missile wars.

Having accomplished the security objective, Vajpayee turned to his real intention for Pakistan: friendship. He first reached out to Nawaz Sharif, now back as prime minister of Pakistan, at the Colombo summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation—a regional bloc that India saw as its sphere of influence and Pakistan as a forum to network with other countries that felt threatened by India's overwhelming size. It had not even been two months since the nuclear tests, though, and Vajpayee's initiative must have surprised Sharif too much for him to respond.

Sharif had thawed by the time both prime ministers were in New York a couple of months later for the United Nations General Assembly. So a path was paved at their bilateral meeting there for Vajpayee to visit Pakistan in February 1999. It was a euphoric visit. Fusing everyman's populism with old-world pageantry, Vajpayee rode across the border on a bus, the first to cross the short distance from Amritsar to Lahore for a long time, and he was received like triumphal royalty.

Sharif had even instructed the chiefs of staff of Pakistan's forces to salute Vajpayee at the border in front of the world's cameras, but the army chief would have none of that. Pervez Musharraf had been promoted out of turn because Sharif feared that his predecessor was powerful enough to engineer a coup (a miscalculation, it later turned out). Finally, a compromise was worked out: companies of Pakistan's armed forces dipped regimental flags to honour Vajpayee at the border and the three chiefs saluted him privately when his helicopter landed on the lawns of the Punjab governor's house.

The salutes were meant to lull. Pakistan's army had long been a separate power centre and did not let elected governments stray far from its foreign and strategic priorities. India's finance minister, P. Chidambaram, had discovered this at a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in 1997. When Indian prime minister, I.K. Gujral, asked him to present trade possibilities to Sharif at that meeting, Sharif had nodded enthusiastically along until a uniformed army officer in the delegation whispered in his ear after having left the room briefly. Chidambaram met a blank wall thereafter.

The Pakistan Army had an ambitious military plan in mind by the time Vajpayee visited Lahore. Majid Dar, the deputy chief

commander of Hizb-ul Mujahideen, would later say that when he asked Lieutenant General Aziz Khan (who became number two to Musharraf) about the dissipation of the movement in 1997 and 1998, he had been told to wait, that Pakistan had a plan. Dar got the impression that General Jehangir Karamat, Musharraf's predecessor as army chief, had not approved the plan in 1997. Yet, his subordinates had begun to set the stage, just in case. During the summer of 1998, they stepped up shelling of the road that led via Manigam to Ladakh, crossing the main Himalayan range around Kargil.

That road supplied Indian forces on the pinnacles of ice above the Siachen glacier, over which the two armies had been battling since 1983. The Pakistan brass hoped Indian access to it could be severed in the summer of 1999. At a meeting in the second week of March, they got Sharif to agree that the heat must be raised that summer to pressure the Indians at the negotiating table. They left the details opaque.

They may not have mentioned crossing the Line of Control but troops had slipped across within weeks of Vajpayee's exhilarating visit, to dig into concrete bunkers on soaring ridges of ice overlooking the road. Controlling the porters and others who supported those troops logistically were men from the valley—Bahadur Khan prominent among them. Some Kashmiris were quick to notice, though, that the troops on those lethal heights were from Gilgit, men of the Northern Light Infantry. 'No Punjabi blood was spilt in Kargil,' a veteran Kashmiri political activist would observe about that Pakistani initiative—only slightly exaggerating the truth.

The Indian Army was taken utterly by surprise when the snow began to melt—early as it happened—and the people of Kargil rushed to report the intrusions. Once the army had, after a couple of weeks, got its head out of the sand, Vajpayee's orders were succinct: every effort was to be made to expel the intruders but the battle was not to cross the Line of Control. Although general elections were round the corner, he was not going to risk a nuclear conflagration.

That, however, was exactly what the West feared. When Sharif invited himself to Washington to persuade the US to broker talks in exchange for a Pakistani withdrawal, he got a dressing down instead. The intruders, who could have held on to several of the heights until winter, suspended fighting till the next summer, and withdrew over the next couple of weeks.

The Kargil adventure had backfired. Not only did the road to Siachen remain open, India backed away from negotiating a solution to Kashmir, a process that had begun during Vajpayee's Lahore visit. Before the Kargil intrusions had been discovered, nominees of the two prime ministers had discussed possibilities. Sharif's nominee was Niaz Naik, who had negotiated with India's M.K. Rasgotra in the early 1980s. Vajpayee's representative was R.K. Mishra, a former journalist who managed various political operations for India's largest industrial group, Reliance. Reliance apparently wanted to build a fertilizer plant in collaboration with Sharif's family, and perhaps to pipe oil and gas from Central Asia across Pakistan.

Meeting in a room at Delhi's Imperial Hotel, they had narrowed the dispute. R.K. Mishra had proposed that India could give up its claim to everything across the Line of Control. Naik had proposed a border along the Chenab, which flows between Jammu and Kashmir. Tacitly then, both sides had accepted that the dispute was essentially over the valley. But neither India nor Pakistan wanted an independent Kashmir and neither could agree to the other having control.

Even before the two prime ministers' nominees had begun to brainstorm, an idea that tried to bridge the gap between them had surfaced—or rather, resurfaced. It was Abdullah's Greater Kashmir plan, only dressed up this time with slick graphics on the finest art paper. It proposed an autonomous state from the Chenab to Kargil and Azad Kashmir, the defence and foreign relations of which would be jointly managed by India and Pakistan. A bipartisan group of US legislators had put their names to the repackaged proposal under the aegis of a Kashmir Study Group, which Farooq Kathwari, an American of Kashmiri origin, had floated. He had gained wealth and influence through his furniture business, and had been drawn to do something about Kashmiri independence after a mujahid's body discovered in Afghanistan turned out to be that of his only son.

Farooq Abdullah was among those whom Kathwari had met in the winter of 1998 to canvas support for that slick presentation, but he did not get very far even with Abdullah's son. 'He told me this has the Americans' blessings, they are party to it,' Farooq would later say, adding that he told his people to fight it tooth and nail, for it was a disastrous idea.

Of course, Kashmir for the most part still did not know what it wanted, only that it wanted the most that it could wrest. Most

Kashmiris spoke of freedom for the entire state that Hari Singh had once ruled but could not explain how the people of 95 per cent of that territory would be persuaded to join their project. Nor did they have an ideology, charter or system in mind other than their hackneyed 'struggle for the right to self-determination', no more precise than it had been when first formulated by the Plebiscite Front in 1955.

The Hurriyat leaders could not agree on a programme beyond that, even though they had plenty of time to try in the autumn of 1999. They had little else to do in the large, rectangular barrack that they among them shared at Jodhpur jail. It was still a depressing place, lit by a single naked light bulb, although the Hurriyat leaders were being treated a little better than the detainees had been in 1990. They were dressed in kurta-pajama outfits and had been given fans and two blankets apiece to spread on the bare concrete floor. They would often bunch the blankets on evenings, so that they could chat or listen to the transistor radio which, after much cajoling, they had persuaded the superintendent to let them keep.

On 12 October 1999, Radio Pakistan's evening bulletin was particularly drab. They tuned to the BBC's 8.30 bulletin instead. That was electrifying. A coup was under way in Pakistan. Troops had stormed the prime minister's house and the television station, for the army had claimed power on behalf of General Pervez Musharraf. Sharif had tried to sack him as army chief earlier that day.

Geelani and Yasin were immediately elated that Sharif had been ousted. They blamed him for letting their movement down in Kargil. Professor, who was sitting as usual a little away from Geelani, interjected to say that even bad democracy was better than dictatorship. A few days later, Geelani too decided that the coup was not a good thing, but his reason was different. Qazi Hussein, the chief of Pakistan's Jamaat, had by then poured scorn on Musharraf for idolizing the modernist Kamal Ataturk—and for cuddling pet Pomeranians.

Geelani's opinion was now even more crucial than it had earlier been. He had taken over from the mirwaiz as chairman of the Hurriyat, having got the executive to amend the body's constitution in mid-1998 to limit the chairman's tenure to a single year henceforth. And the Hurriyat, having been largely ignored by New Delhi for the

first five years of its existence, had been edging centre stage since the Vajpayee government had taken office. For Vajpayee's policy was two-pronged: drawing Pakistan into an embrace of friendship and getting the Hurriyat to contest elections and then negotiate a settlement. The coup in Pakistan was a major setback after Vajpayee's rapprochement with Nawaz Sharif but he continued to woo the Hurriyat. R.K. Mishra, the man who had engaged Niaz Naik, got in touch with Geelani too.

It had begun with a touch of farce, for Mishra had invited himself to Geelani's house to say self-deprecatingly that he had come to learn a little about Islam. Geelani sent a huge package of books to Mishra's Delhi address. When Mishra returned to Srinagar, he said he had not found anything that said Muslims could not live together with Hindus. The dialogue got a little more substantive after that but did not yield much.

With Geelani, that dialogue would never have got anywhere—unless New Delhi was willing to hand Kashmir to Pakistan. But there was little choice. Since Farooq Abdullah was now terribly unpopular, the Hurriyat had become the focus of Kashmir's hopes. Under Geelani's zealous leadership, Hurriyat leaders had traversed the length and breadth of the valley during the summer of 1999, even as Howitzers boomed on the Kargil heights—to campaign for a boycott of the Parliamentary elections scheduled for September-end.

Kashmir's response had been effusive. Although the Hurriyat men had hitherto been generally dismissed as opportunists, they were showered with garlands and sweets at several villages that summer. Kashmir was disgusted by then with Farooq—who, as far as Kashmir was concerned, was the face of India. Kashmir's disgust focussed on the corruption that had bounced back and on the nepotism and bribery through which National Conference power brokers such as Ali Sheikh operated.

That was not all. The mercenary Frankenstein that the army had created caused even greater resentment now than when Bahadur had run riot. At least then Kashmir had felt it was caught in a pincer between the Hizb and the mercenaries. Now, with the Hizb having been largely beaten back, it was at the mercy of only the agents of the state. And the police had joined in the tormenting. The government had tried to revive the police in the belief that a local force would alienate Kashmir less. But, as in 1931 and so often through history,

Kashmiris working for the state callously tormented their own people. Extortion, molestation, blackmail and torture were commonplace. So Kashmir responded as to saviours when the Hurriyat leaders went out to campaign against the regime that summer. That rattled Farooq and the Hurriyat leaders were jailed—and, after a while, dispatched again to Jodhpur in the desert.

Umar, the mirwaiz, of course was not jailed. He never had been—except for ten minutes, when his colleagues had dragged him along to the police station when they were rounded up from a meeting at his residence. There was one other omission, though, that summer. Abdul Ghani Lone was not jailed, nor had he joined the campaign against elections. He had spent the summer in the US, where he had had some significant meetings. He returned singing a different tune, decidedly pro-independence rather than pro-Pakistan. Kashmir was not anyone's *atut ang*, nor anyone's *shah-rugh*, he began saying—equating India's line that Kashmir was an inalienable part of India with Pakistan's assertion that Kashmir was its jugular vein.

Most of the following winter, Lone stayed in Delhi. Vajpayee's effort to wean the Hurriyat to negotiate was gradually getting a response. It was still only a partial response, though, and a tentative one at that.

Aftab was among those in jail for campaigning against the elections, for he had joined the Hurriyat Conference. He was, however, not locked up with the top echelon in Jodhpur, but in Jammu jail.

Aftab had spent the first couple of months after his release in the spring of 1998 interacting with various secessionist political groups before deciding to join the mirwaiz's Awami Action Committee. Aftab's family had no 'goat' antecedents but he had spent time living with a staunchly 'goat' family during his underground years in the inner city. The mirwaiz's party had strength in the city and Aftab could relate easily to Umar—who had been junior to him at the Catholic school.

Along with his old comrade Javed, Aftab became a dynamic leader of the demonstrations the Hurriyat often organized, yelling slogans and waving banners at the head of a few score men before dramatically resisting arrest in front of a dozen media cameras. In jail, he had

opportunities to observe vignettes of a trend and an event, both of which pointed towards the failure of Lone's tentative response to Vajpayee's overtures.

Aftab first spent a few weeks in the Rajbagh police station lock-up. With him was one of the wealthiest men in Kashmir, Agha Hasan Budgami. He too was a leader of the Hurriyat Conference. Among his daily visitors was his elder brother, Agha Mehdi. That may not seem strange, until one considers that Mehdi was contesting the elections—on a Congress ticket—and Hasan had been locked up for campaigning against the elections.

The Agha family of Budgam had always kept its political bets covered. It owed its power not primarily to politics but to religion. A large chunk of Kashmir's minority Shias, and much of the predominantly Shia population of Kargil too, treated them as suzerain. So, politics was only their insurance against state interference in that feudal relationship.

The feudatory culture among prominent Shias was inherent in the cause of the 1,400-year-old schism—the belief that the Prophet's son-in-law ought, as family inheritor, to have been the first Caliph—and Kashmir's Shias had for more than a century put their faith for religious and political leadership in one of two families of clerics. The following of the other, the Ansari family, had split when Abbas had refused to accept his first cousin Iftekhar's inheritance of the family mantle, but the Budgamis had stuck together while keeping one foot in every significant political camp. (Mehdi's son would soon contest on a National Conference ticket.)

The Budgamis were only the most obvious Kashmiri politicians who played safe. The problem for Vajpayee's initiative was that a range of other Kashmiri leaders too were ambivalent, albeit less overtly. Lone was virtually the only one willing to stick his neck out to engage in a political process with New Delhi. As Lone too would discover, the others had good reason for caution. Agha Mehdi, the brother who was contesting on a Congress ticket, was soon assassinated. Those across the Line of Control who wanted to keep Kashmir's leaders on a tight leash had developed a more lethal resolve since Pakistan's army chief—one who had earned his spurs through daredevil guerrilla exploits—had taken direct control of political and foreign policies.

When he was shifted from the lock-up to Jammu jail, Aftab witnessed the fringe of an event that demonstrated the high-stakes battles that those pulling the strings in Pakistan were now willing to wage. That was another dimension of Vajpayee's problem. Aftab found himself in the cell next to Masood Azhar, the political head of the Harkat group of which Aftab's mentor in 1990 had been the militant commander. Azhar was more a political thinker and passionate motivator than a battle commander, but his capture had been almost as great a blow for the Harkat as Guga's had been for the Hizbullah.

Harkat was far more resourceful than the Hizbullah, however. It had been formed in the same Pakistani madrasas where the Taliban too had been forged. Around Christmas 1999, a bunch of Harkat boys hijacked an Indian Airlines plane from Kathmandu—which, as Aftab well knew, was an ISI hub—to Kandahar. Holding the passengers and plane hostage on the dusty airstrip, they demanded Masood's release. Two others were on their list: Al Umar's loutish founder, Mushtaq Zargar, and Masood's deputy, Omar Sheikh, who would a couple of years later play a leading role in the abduction and killing of Daniel Pearl of the *Wall Street Journal* in Karachi.

To understand such tactics, one must get beyond such black-and-white labels as 'terrorist' and come to grips with the fact that morality is not universally constant. Many of those who use these lethal tactics consider themselves engaged in war—holy war. In order to respond sensibly, one must understand their choices within that framework, rather than as irrational evil.

Masood Azhar, for example, was a pious man. The knowledge that his freedom was being bargained against the lives of innocent women and children was evidently not easy for him to deal with. During the tense days of negotiation that ended with an exchange of prisoners on the eve of a terror-filled new millennium, he chucked a crumpled piece of paper across the wall into Aftab's cell. Pray for me in this time of trial, the note requested.

Focussed as they were on eternal bliss in heaven, the rectitude of men like Guga and Masood was often uneasy about the methods of terror—as when Aftab had abducted a woman. When they accepted such methods, it was because they believed their enemies were systematically tormenting Muslim societies—to the extent of genocide,

in the prisms of their minds. Islam was under global assault, they thought, by a neo-crusade. The devil was in contextual semantics: what the West called democratization and women's empowerment sounded in their ears like cultural conversion, or degradation, even extinction.

Mores must grow organically within a society, in tandem with the wealth to sustain individualistic lifestyles. The lonely struggles that accompany liberty can terrify people used to social cocoons. But by century-end, the West, focussed tightly on creating consumers for multinationals, had forgotten the shock with which women dressed in street-length black skirts and bonnets had been watched just eighty years before when they had demonstrated on the streets of London for the right to vote.

Cultural reactions against contemporary Western lifestyles had dovetailed with the perception that Muslim lands were being politically dominated by the West to exploit their most valuable resource: oil. The moral commitment of men like Masood and Guga gave their will to fight this exploitation an indomitable edge. Kashmir by and large did not share this cultural reaction but was caught up in it simply because it had outsourced its militancy: Lashkar and Harkat wielded weapons in its name. So it was through an operation conducted by Pakistanis under the patronage of Pakistan's protégé, the Taliban, that the release of Azhar and two others was obtained.

The methods of terror had changed radically since Musharraf's coup. A few weeks before the hijacking, a daring assault at Srinagar's cantonment gate, headquarters of an entire corps, had flagged the launch of a new tactic: *fidayeen* or suicidal attacks that took the battle to the camps of the Indian forces, even their families' quarters. Once the heat of Kargil had set their adrenaline surging, Lashkar's puritan cadre of boys from among Pakistan's zealous rural poor were easily motivated to seek infidels, assured of a rapturous eternity in heaven for themselves, and monetary compensation in Pakistan for their families.

It was a brilliant military tactic, calculated to rattle morale and cause jittery soldiers to shoot anyone approaching a camp who looked the slightest bit suspicious. The timing of the manoeuvre was perfect too, for the army units that had been hurriedly pulled from the valley to Kargil were just finding their feet and the paramilitary

units that had been dispatched instead were still new to the areas they had to manage.

The Indian Army had to adjust quickly. The new millennium held the promise of a far more challenging sort of war than the techniques which had grown out of twentieth-century world wars could handle. The rules of war were being rewritten more radically than in the Great War, when cavalry honour had given way to the robotic might of tanks. That machine, which had proved so vital to cross the trenches of northern France in 1916, was going to be no better than a sitting duck in a century in which even precision-guided missiles would search in vain for elusive targets.

Faced with fierce suicide attacks in their barracks and command posts, the Indian Army rose to the challenge with exemplary restraint during the early years of the new century. But the outstanding generals in charge had reason to regret their predecessors' tardiness in 1997 and 1998. The army then had rested too easily on their success in crippling the Hizb and conducting the 1996 elections, largely ignoring the Lashkar and Harkat bands that had begun roaming the upper reaches, gradually digging in. Those groups had taken to heart the ISI's instructions that smug Kashmiri commanders like Aftab had in their search for hero worship largely ignored—camp in the forests and target the Indian forces, keeping away from ordinary Kashmiris as much as possible.

The sluggishness of that period was not the fault of the field officers, though. Their predecessors had drawn up a plan a few years earlier to wipe militancy out but their chief had, after watching an impressive audio-visual presentation at Srinagar's cantonment, turned to the corps commander and suggested zestfully that it was time for a glass of cold beer. As they moved towards the beer, he had added enigmatically that the government's instructions were that they fight militancy, not finish it.

Any bureaucracy seeks to increase its size, clout and budget, and armies are among the most bureaucratic of organizations. The vast mobilization of the army in Kashmir after the death of General Joshi—the one who had recalled even the battalions his predecessor had sent when Krishna Rao was demanding more troops—had brought funding, promotions and sometimes less evident benefits to army officers. So

much so that officers often lobbied strenuously for a Kashmir posting in 1997 and 1998.

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Despite such severe setbacks as the hijacking, Vajpayee remained steadfast in his quest for peace; but his roller-coaster ride continued.

First, he had some good news. Indo-US relations had improved so dramatically since those nuclear tests that President Clinton came calling in March 2000. It was an overwhelming visit, the welcome even more effusive than Vajpayee's had been in Lahore. Members of India's Parliament clambered over each other like children to shake his hand after he addressed Parliament. Clinton had just announced that the Line of Control must be respected. Terrorism must stop, and nations must realize that borders would not be redrawn in blood. The US had finally, unequivocally, abandoned the backing it had given Pakistan's claims to Kashmir from 1948 right through to the mid-1990s. Clinton spent the rest of that trip dancing happily with village women and patting their babies, his eye firmly focussed on a mushrooming market for US-based multinationals.

Ironically, that visit flagged a new low in Kashmir's relations with the Indian state. Just when diplomacy had worked wonders, unsavoury ground tactics further alienated Kashmir. Quite unlike the theatrical little Hurriyat demonstrations that were routine, Srinagar surged with stone-pelting mobs for three days barely a month after Clinton's visit. The anger was not over what Clinton had told Parliament but what had happened while he was in Delhi. Soldiers—apparently working in tandem with the local police—had rounded up five Gujjars from hamlets in the remote southern folds of Kashmir's mountains and shot them. The bodies had been burnt before being buried, so that identification would be difficult, and an announcement was made that the bodies were of the militants who had killed twenty-two in a hamlet of Kashmiri Sikhs on the eve of Clinton's arrival. The official version was that the five had been killed in a gun battle as they resisted capture.

Kashmir not only dismissed that story with contempt, it was convinced that the massacre of Sikhs too had been the work of Indian forces posing as militants, so that Clinton might believe that Kashmir's movement involved genocide against non-Muslims. That tactic was

only the straw that broke the camel's back. Kashmir had already reached breaking point with the increasing torture of the Special Task Force, the sword arm of the police force, which had by this time taken a lead over the army's mercenary gangs as chief tormentor.

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Clinton's visit set off another tense round in the chess game of peace moves. This was a particularly slippery round, for intelligence agencies in both Pakistan and India were playing their smartest sleights of hand.

Clinton had gone straight from India to Pakistan but, after his idyllic five days in India, that visit seemed like a slap. He had slipped stealthily off a plane accompanying Air Force One, as if his Secret Service was convinced that one of the SAM missiles his predecessors had dispatched to Pakistan would hit his jet. Then his convoy swept through streets that had been emptied and, as if to emphasize the contrast with his address to India's Parliament, he had spoken to Pakistan from the safety of a television studio.

The shock of that treatment gave Pakistan pause and led to a flurry of meetings. One of the most crucial meetings took place a few weeks later. It was attended by the ISI chief, Lieutenant General Mehmood Ahmed, and his deputy, Major General Faiz Jeelani. They sat with Salahuddin and his deputy, Majid Dar—by this make-or-break phase, Pakistan's generals dealt directly with Kashmiri commanders.

Hizb's shoura had been chafing ever since the Kargil withdrawal, particularly over the way Clinton had treated Sharif in Washington on 4 July 1999. So the shoura had decided even before Clinton's visit to Pakistan that Majid should return to the valley to seek a way out of the impasse. That was why the council had asked to meet the ISI top brass.

When the brass had finally agreed to a meeting, only the two commanders were invited. Majid soon realized why. The officers were not there to listen to recriminations about Kargil or Clinton's snubs but to discuss a plan. Majid would say a year and a half later that, at that meeting, the officers agreed that Majid should go back to the valley but for a specific purpose: he was to offer India a ceasefire with three conditions—conditions that India was bound to reject.

On his way back, Majid stopped for a week in Dubai. His young second wife lived there and agents of India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) had managed to fan the desire in her heart to return to the valley. Majid would later deny that his plan was altered in Dubai but he did decide by the time he returned that he should 'take my cadre into confidence' before announcing the ceasefire offer. While doing that, he also consulted several Hurriyat leaders. Perhaps he was trying to guard against being denounced but, by doing so, he took on Pakistan's wiliest strategist in Kashmir: Geelani.

Many of the Hurriyat leaders were eager—the mirwaiz even suggested that the Hurriyat could announce the ceasefire offer—but Geelani asked Majid to wait until elections had been held for both the Hurriyat chair and the Jamaat chief. Geelani was struggling that summer to retain his iron grip on the Hurriyat and hoped also to finally displace Butt—the man who had succeeded Saduddin in 1985 and had taken over again from Hakim Ghulam Nabi in 1997. Butt had allowed Geelani to remain head of the Jamaat's political bureau but had, since 1997, steadily steered the organization away from politics.

The Hurriyat election came first. Although Yasin had naturally gravitated towards Lone, the new votary of independence, Geelani depended on the other five on the omnipotent executive for the two-third vote needed to amend the constitution again, so that he could remain chairman another year. This year, he could see, was going to be crucial.

He made a tactical error, however. He sat by while his lieutenants criticized the young mirwaiz for going to Farooq's house to condole the death of his mother, the nonagenarian Mother Beneficent. That gave the mirwaiz a handle to take his growing closeness with Lone and Yasin into the open and it soon became clear that Geelani would not get another term.

The meeting to elect a new chairman was tense. After years, at least part of the executive was braced to defy Geelani. Yasin began, proposing that Lone be the next chairman. The mirwaiz seconded that. Then Professor spoke, to suggest that perhaps Geelani could continue another year. Geelani promptly put off the election till the next day and proposed Professor's candidature when they reconvened. Yasin leapt up, shouting that this was what he wanted: democracy. Even Yasin knew of course that Professor and Abbas Ansari might see it as a do-or-die

choice rather than democracy but, either way, Professor became the Hurriyat's third chairman that day, elected by four votes against three. Lone was bitter. The inconsequential faction of the People's League that Lone had inducted to replace Shabir had, after a night filled with frenetic lobbying for its vote, tipped the balance against him.

The election for the new Hurriyat chief took place on 22 July 2000 but Geelani only handed Professor the reins on the 1st of August. He was trying to delay Majid's announcement until the Jamaat election had also been held. Majid, however, was not willing to bow to Geelani's dictation. On the 29th of July, he announced a unilateral ceasefire by the Hizb and invited the Government of India to negotiate with his old comrade, Fazl-ul Haq Qureshi, who had worked in his youth for the Muslim Youth Federation and had become the first president of the People's League before mooting the Hurriyat in 1992. He had been relegated to the Hurriyat general council then. Now, it was the executive that was left out.

Professor had been the most enthusiastic when Majid had first suggested the ceasefire a few weeks earlier but became wary when Geelani did not turn up for the meeting to consider the Hurriyat's response. At Abbas's suggestion, they all went to Geelani's house and decided at his behest to oppose the ceasefire. At the meeting, Geelani told the others they ought to investigate what had happened when Majid had stopped over at Dubai.

The Pakistani brass was furious at the way Majid had presented the ceasefire, for he had modified the conditions they had dictated. Although Lieutenant General Mehmood chided the United Jihad Council for calling Majid a traitor during a meeting, telling them that Majid had consulted the ISI, he did instruct Salahuddin to withdraw the offer—and, until he was sure of Salahuddin's role, replaced him as United Jihad Council chairman.

The entire initiative was finally reduced to a farce, for the talks between Fazl-ul Haq Qureshi and India's home secretary were tripped up by having the media glare directed towards it. The government knew Qureshi represented hardly anybody in Kashmir, and that Majid, who could barely keep a lid on Hizb's violence, could do nothing to stop the more lethal Harkat and Lashkar.

Vajpayee had focussed from the outset on getting the Hurriyat to contest elections and then negotiate, and that objective was pursued

with greater vigour now that Geelani's grip was loosening and Lone at least was standing up to Pakistan.

In fact, Lone had consolidated his pro-independence image by fixing a match between his younger son, Sajad, and the daughter of the Muzaffarabad-based JKLF founder, Amanullah Khan. When Lone went to Pakistan for the wedding in November 2000, he shocked his hosts by asserting as soon as he arrived at Lahore airport that Kashmir's movement was for the liberation of the entire place—on both sides of the Line of Control. So unnerved were his hosts that, when he landed at Islamabad, militants thronged and carried him through the VIP lounge before he could speak to the media—or even to Sajad.

Lone was a seasoned politician, though. He turned even that demonstrative reception into an issue. No minister or other VIP had been there to receive him, he noted in a speech during an *iftar* party, the holy month of Ramzan having begun soon after the wedding. Questions had been asked about protocol, he said, but he did not care—what did he know of protocol, he who had suffered the blows of Indian oppression on every part of his body. Lone had already surprised the evening's host, the chief of the Azad Kashmir chapter of the Jamaat, and his khan-dress-clad other guests by turning up in a dark blue Western suit.

His speech was heard in utter silence.

The Indian government responded, though. Vajpayee had announced a unilateral ceasefire by Indian forces in the valley for the month of Ramzan. At the end of that month, he extended the ceasefire. The Hurriyat executive responded excitedly at the next meeting—all except Geelani. The ceasefire was a good thing, he said guardedly, but they should welcome it only if the Indian government allowed them to go to Pakistan.

Tension mounted as the government considered Geelani's rider. Lone, Yasin and the mirwaiz spent the rest of that winter in Delhi and, raring to engage with the government, pleaded to be allowed to go. They would say nothing tendentious, they made it clear, only plead with the militants and others there for a total ceasefire so that negotiations could move ahead. R.K. Mishra told them the prime minister was willing. The deputy prime minister, L.K. Advani, however, would agree only if Geelani was left out. The Jamaat, the militants and therefore the media in Pakistan were sure to focus exclusively on Geelani if he was there.

The others left it to Professor to name the delegation and he dared not leave Geelani out. He left himself out instead. 'That was very essential,' he would later explain, 'because if Geelani was left out, it would lead to problems within and outside as well. Jamaat people came out directly, and strong—including the United Jihad Council—that we would not be welcome without him.'

Professor had been faithfully following Geelani's writ. He had even announced while Lone was still shocking his hosts in Pakistan that Lone was on a private visit, not authorized to speak on behalf of the Hurriyat. Professor had reasons for caution, and his brother's assassination was not the only one. When he was about to leave a public meeting at Tarzua village not far from his home later that winter, someone noticed something dangling beneath his car. It was a bomb that had been tied there during his speech. He could not even complain to the police. He was chairman of the Hurriyat Conference, standard-bearer of the movement.

An equally chilling warning had been delivered to Aftab in January 2001. Two young men had come to his door one morning, saying they wanted his help to get jobs. When he had appeared at the top of the wooden staircase that led into the yard, though, one of them had whipped out a pistol and opened fire. Aftab had managed to duck as the duo climbed the stairs towards him, and swing his kangri at them. While the hot ash blinded them, he had slammed the door at the top of the stairs. Blinded by the ash, the men had retreated, firing at the upstairs veranda as they fled. The mirwaiz had closed circuit cameras installed at home after that, for Aftab had obviously been targetted for having publicly welcomed the prime minister's ceasefire announcement.

By the time the government finally appointed a representative to negotiate, the enthusiasm of the three who had camped in Delhi through winter had been sapped by those warnings and the tension over whether they might visit Pakistan. Nor did the negotiator enthuse them. It was K.C. Pant, the man who had headed a cabinet committee that did nothing in 1989. The Hurriyat refused to talk to him. Only men like Shabir Shah and Azam Inquilabi did, happy to be given some importance. Nothing came of those exchanges.

Frustrated with the failure of his unilateral ceasefire—which had been a huge political risk—Vajpayee decided by summer 2001 that if the Hurriyat executive did not dare step beyond the dance Pakistan

piped through Geelani, he might as well talk to the piper. So he suddenly dropped his insistence of the past twenty months that India would have nothing to do with the military dictator it held responsible for the Kargil adventure. Reverting to his initial policy—seeking friendship with Pakistan while persuading the Hurriyat to contest elections and then negotiate—Vajpayee invited Musharraf to meet him in Agra, once the capital of the Mughal empire.

So important did the meeting seem that Musharraf dubbed himself president before going but, although the media went ballistic with hype, nothing came of it. When Vajpayee urged that they should resolve all their differences, Musharraf smelt a dodge. He was determined to force negotiations specifically on Kashmir while India was still under pressure. Pakistan, particularly its army, had invested too much time, effort and money in twelve years of militancy to let it go waste.

Musharraf knew Pakistan's participation in Kashmir's militancy could not go on much longer. He had felt the heat of US pressure too strongly when Clinton had come calling and his weak economy gave the superpower too many pressure points. That did not encourage him to compromise but to push ahead with urgency. Musharraf was single-minded: India must acknowledge in writing that Kashmir was the core issue between the two countries.

Vajpayee, eager to move ahead, was willing but some of his colleagues insisted that Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorism must be the primary issue if Kashmir was in focus. India's official position after all was that Hari Singh's accession was adequate. To accept Musharraf's formulation was to agree at the point of a terrorist's gun to negotiate something that India had hitherto termed non-negotiable.

Catch-22 locked the neighbours in its grip again. India said it would negotiate only after the gunfire ceased but Pakistan's brass was sure India would back away as soon as the pressure of violence eased. Although nothing came of the Agra summit, Musharraf did return a little less confident than he had been that India's back was to the wall—pinched between Kargil and fidayeen.

Far more unsettling, he had got a better idea of the bent of Kashmir's mind—through the Hurriyat leaders. He had met them in the Pakistan high commissioner's study on the eve of the summit. Lone and the mirwaiz had buttonholed Professor the day before that,

at the flat that Shabir had rented for the Hurriyat in south Delhi. Professor must speak for them, Lone had insisted, and the men in that room agreed on three points that should be made.

At the meeting with Musharraf, however, Professor stopped short with two. First, he said that the 'guest mujahideen' from outside Kashmir were causing complications. They were, he indicated, not welcome. Second, he said that the Security Council resolutions for a plebiscite were unlikely at this stage to provide the basis for a solution.

When he saw that Professor was not going to make the third point, Lone interjected. The people, he said, were tired of violence. They had suffered enough.

Geelani spoke up then. Some people may be tired, he said spiritedly, but he was not.

Turning to Professor, Musharraf said the points he had made were loaded. They needed to be discussed.

There was little really to discuss, though. The points Professor and Lone between them made were crystal clear. Kashmir wanted out of the cycle of violence, and the non-Kashmiri mujahideen that had increasingly carried the burden of Pakistan's effort over the past few years were unwelcome. More important, the Hurriyat—apart from Geelani—were not interested in the United Nations resolutions or any other device that would leave Kashmir with only one choice—being integrated into India or Pakistan.

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Nine Eleven

India's Cabinet Committee on Security met within a few hours after men from the Al Qaeda network slammed hijacked jet liners into New York's World Trade Center (WTC) and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. It was night in New Delhi and the large flower arrangement at the centre of the room contrasted with the strained expressions all round the rectangular arrangement of tables in the committee room of the bungalow where Farooq's colleagues had waited when he had been taken to meet Narasimha Rao.

Vajpayee sat in the middle of one long side, flanked by the home minister, the external affairs minister and the finance minister. K.C. Pant, the man who had tried earlier to talk to Kashmiri leaders, was invited too. He had cabinet rank as deputy chairman of the Planning Commission. Also present was the prime minister's principal secretary and national security adviser, Brajesh Mishra. The cabinet secretary completed the array on that side of the rectangle. Opposite them sat the three chiefs of staff of India's armed forces, with the chiefs of the intelligence agencies on one side and the defence secretary on the other.

The meeting took stock, not only of what had occurred in the US a few hours earlier, but its likely reverberations in the subcontinent. The key prognoses came up, though, at a separate meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee next morning. After their meeting, they advised the prime minister that Musharraf would now move against the Islamists within his country but would probably deflect those angry soldiers of jihad from Afghanistan towards Kashmir.

Indeed, Musharraf had already begun to move against militant Islamists in Pakistan a month before the WTC attacks. He had banned battle groups of Sunnis and Shias, Laskhar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Mohammed Pakistan. And in June 2001, his government had gathered

clerics and Islamic scholars from across the country for him to tell them that the world saw their country as backward and about to go under. 'It looks upon us as terrorists. We have been killing each other and now we want to spread violence and terror abroad,' he had said. But Musharraf's moves were strategic. He had only banned groups engaged in sectarian war within Pakistan, not those involved in jihad in Afghanistan, Kashmir or elsewhere.

The repercussions of the WTC attacks were discussed further at the next meeting of India's Cabinet Committee on Security. Having already made their points about Pakistan's likely moves to the prime minister, the chiefs now spoke of Enduring Freedom. That was the operation the US was initiating against the Al Qaeda network. It was an example, the chiefs held, of a nation retaliating against terror attacks by invading the country where the attackers were trained, armed and sheltered—an example that India would do well to follow. In any case, the chiefs added, the US invasion had little to do with freedom. It was a long-term strategy to ensure that US forces were based in Afghanistan.

The defence minister, Jaswant Singh, disagreed. There was nothing sinister in the US's plans, he insisted. He was the man who had been present when Shabir Shah had met Vajpayee. An erudite gentleman formed in the ambience of maharajas, he had been the minister for external affairs and led India's team for talks with the US after the nuclear tests, the ones that recast India from a defiant rogue into a strategic partner, and he was a staunch defender of that new partnership.

The army chief, S. Padmanabhan, however, was focussed sharply on the enemy that had mounted the Kargil operation. A man who saw things in black and white, he had been corps commander in Srinagar in 1993 and 1994, when his troops often behaved like an occupation force. As chief of army staff, he had been chafing through a year of ceasefires and failed talks. When the chiefs had been asked for an opinion at a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security before the Agra summit, they had advised caution. Don't forget what Musharraf did at Kargil, they said, or his coup.

Now Padmanabhan drew up plans. India should strike the camps across the Line of Control from where militants were dispatched. A decisive strike, he said, could smash the camps. Since the US was doing

exactly that in Afghanistan, and the part of Hari Singh's state across the Line of Control was legally a part of India, the attack would be unimpeachable. The armed forces proposed the end of October 2001 for the operation. Like those on the other side who had planned the tribesmen's invasion fifty-four years ago, they calculated that the objective would be achieved just before snow sealed the ridges.

The prime minister was attentive. He even asked rhetorically at one point how long cross-border terrorism could be tolerated. He too was tiring of his frustrated attempts to build peace, constantly resisting the quiet but apparent cynicism of not only his chiefs but also some of his cabinet colleagues.

As if to validate the chiefs' prediction that Pakistan would divert terror to Kashmir, a van that had been stolen rammed the gate of the state legislative assembly in Srinagar on 1 October. Militants leapt out, firing, and tried to take over the building along with the legislators there. The house had adjourned just a little earlier.

Jaish-e-Mohammed claimed responsibility. That was the group Masood Azhar—who had been released in exchange for those hijacked prisoners on a New Year's Eve—had founded in Pakistan. It was a new edition of the Harkat. Under pressure from the US to end support to terrorism, the ISI had come up with a new tactic: it repackaged discredited groups with new names.

Even after the attack at the assembly in Srinagar, Jaswant Singh continued to oppose Padmanabhan's plan. It could flare into full-scale war and the world would not ignore war between nuclear powers, he argued. India would be back to square one: a rogue in the eyes of the West. Jaswant Singh had been given the defence portfolio when the previous incumbent—that old Kashmir hand, George Fernandes—had got entangled in a scandal. The prime minister had given the portfolio to him as a temporary additional charge, firm that Fernandes would return to the job after he was cleared. The inquiry was still under way but the idea of going to war was gathering such momentum that Vajpayee brought Fernandes back as defence minister in mid-October. Fernandes liked Padmanabhan's plan better than Jaswant Singh did but Jaswant, still external affairs minister and a member of that most powerful cabinet committee, held firm. So the orders that had been given at the end of September, to make preparations but not to move yet, stood.

Three months after 11 September, the signal to India's armed forces was still amber—and now only dully so. But when the cabinet committee met on the evening of 13 December, there was a steely glint in the eyes of the chiefs. Parliament House was still being searched when the meeting began. A group of attackers, one of them strapped for explosive suicide, had been killed along with several security men after a fierce gun battle that had raged for hours. The five assailants had driven into the Parliament premises that morning in a car that looked like a minister's—with security labels and a beacon light. Uniformed like security men in an escort car, they had been armed with AK-47s, plastic explosives and grenades—and equipped for a siege.

Jaswant Singh's office, as leader of the Rajya Sabha, was just a few feet from the door to Parliament House outside which most of the fighting had taken place. So his life could have been threatened more than that of any other member of the cabinet committee. Yet, he overruled the chiefs' desire to mobilize troops against Pakistan immediately, insisting that the bodies first be properly identified.

The meeting adjourned pending investigation. By the next morning, those present were satisfied when it was reported to them that mobile phones, a laptop and other evidence had been examined. The chiefs wanted to mobilize for war—although, they added, it was already late. Winter was upon them, and could foil the plans they had made for October-end. But Jaswant had been in touch overnight with his counterpart in Washington. Colin Powell had assured him that the US would deal with Pakistan, he told the committee. Terrorism would be finished, not just in Afghanistan and the US, but everywhere, even Kashmir. Padmanabhan still maintained that Pakistan would never stop unless it was given a bloody nose but Jaswant Singh's compromise was accepted. Troops would mobilize only as a tactic in coercive diplomacy—to dovetail with US pressure. The order was finally given: mobilize. Pakistan's army too prepared for war and, for the next several months, hundreds of thousands of men, tanks and mortars faced each other along the border.

Coercive diplomacy appeared at first to have an impact. Musharraf banned the Jaish and Lashkar, and several leading lights of both were arrested. But it turned out to be a ruse. The arrested guerrillas and their motivators were covertly released over the next several months

and, though the ISI made sure that all the groups moved offices, camps and signboards, they were not shut down. Not only that, the mortar firing that had helped crossings like Aftab's continued and the wireless net that kept militants in touch—using very costly frequency-jumping sets that made it almost impossible for trackers to determine their locations—kept crackling with instructions. Such rare technology as those Kenwood sets was available only to the US and Pakistan armies. The meaning was clear: those already in Kashmir, and the mountain tracts between Kashmir and Jammu, would keep the battle going while those on the Pakistani side of the Line of Control remained covert.

Furtively then might Pakistan have evaded coercive diplomacy but it was deeply unsettled. Hysteria had been orchestrated in the Western media about an imminent nuclear holocaust in South Asia and the heat of US pressure was intense. Nor, for the first time since 1990, could Pakistan's generals take lightly the possibility that India might actually attack. So it was in a mood of desperation that it watched the growing clout of the pro-independence ginger group within the Hurriyat. The body that the ISI had controlled so effectively through Geelani for years threatened now to become a monster. Since Professor now held the Hurriyat chair, they were not sure that Geelani would be able to carry the majority. All Lone needed was for Professor or Ansari to join his group for the balance to turn against Geelani.

A desperate tug of war was under way behind the scenes for that majority. It was a crucial battle, for Farooq was in the last year of his six-year term as chief minister. Another round of elections was due by October 2002 and, egged on by the West, Lone and the mirwaiz at least were contemplating the possibility of getting involved. Other than the Jamaat, they were the only ones in the executive with ground support. Their conditions were that their candidates should not have to swear by the Constitution of India, that Western observers supervise the process and that some of the constituencies be redrawn (they had been reconfigured over the years to suit parties in power and the mirwaiz's support base in Srinagar's inner city had been split into three constituencies).

Since Farooq's government was hugely unpopular, a number of Lone's and the mirwaiz's supporters could have been elected. If they formed the government, the stage would be set for what Vajpayee had targetted from the beginning: talks with the Hurriyat or its representatives after they had the people's mandate.

Lone and the mirwaiz were uneasy, however. Their flank was weak. Yasin's tune had changed since he had returned from the US—where he had been on 9/11. He had brought the gun to Kashmir, he told his colleagues, and could not give it up. He came up with a hare-brained proposal that the Hurriyat should contest elections only if these were conducted by an election commission appointed by the Hurriyat, on both sides of the Line of Control. He and Professor had even chosen a commission and the Hurriyat executive had adopted the plan while Lone and the mirwaiz were in New Delhi—although the duo had pleaded that a decision be put off until they could attend. Miffed, neither attended a Hurriyat meeting for a long time thereafter.

Pakistan was desperate to rein the Hurriyat in. So when the mirwaiz decided to go to Saudi Arabia to condole the death of the son of the chief priest of the Ka'aba, Abdul Qayoom Khan got in touch, asking that they meet in Dubai. The mirwaiz promptly suggested that Lone be asked to come as well. The meeting was arranged at a hotel in Dubai owned by a Pandit friend of Lone's son Sajad.

Azad Kashmir's leading politician turned up with a high-powered team from Pakistan, including the chief of the ISI and officers of the foreign ministry. Lone did some plain speaking, as was his wont, and got into a heated argument with an ISI officer who insisted that Geelani alone was the leader of Kashmir. The interest of the people of Kashmir was his chief priority, Lone said, that of India or Pakistan secondary. The people's suffering must end, he thundered. He did make it clear, though, that the Hurriyat would act together.

Lone's tough talk must have left the Pakistanis very worried.

Lone went to the US from Dubai and returned to Srinagar on 19 May 2002. The next day, he addressed a seminar at which the entire top leadership of the Hurriyat spoke. There, in Geelani's presence, Lone said that there was no truth to the rumour that he intended to contest elections but added with a grin that it was not heresy to participate in elections.

A day after, Lone was assassinated. It was the anniversary of Mirwaiz Farooq's assassination and tens of thousands of 'goats' milled about the vast Idgah grounds. Lone had joined the other Hurriyat leaders for prayers at the adjacent burial ground. Mirwaiz Umar's followers bundled him into his car as soon as the prayers were over and, while the car was receding into the distance, a couple of boys pumped bullets into Lone, who was waiting alone for his car.

Sajad's grief exploded in front of television cameras that evening. The ISI, Hurriyat and Geelani had killed his father, he yelled, even as women of the family struggled frantically to pull him away from the cameras. His mother forced him to retract that statement by morning, so that he too did not become a target, but he was not alone in feeling such passionate anger. Lone's party workers assaulted not only Geelani but Professor too when they arrived to condole. Neither was allowed to approach Lone's body.

Lone's death left a vacuum in the politics of north Kashmir but Sajad took over as president of the People's Conference while Bilal took his father's place on the Hurriyat executive. In tandem, they pushed on over the next few months with their father's intention. They secretly backed fifteen candidates, many of them independent but some belonging to political parties. These included four prominent leaders of their party who resigned to contest as independents. The party announced that it had nothing to do with them but both brothers supported them covertly.

Only one of the four won but some of the other eleven did. Not enough, though, to give the brothers much clout in the new assembly. Mufti Mohammed Sayeed—who had eyed the chair in Srinagar even when he was India's home minister—won the tense battle to be the next chief minister.

Focussed as always on the immediate, Kashmir had voted single-mindedly to defeat Farooq, unmindful of who would take his place. As a result, whoever happened to be the strongest candidate or party in each valley constituency emerged victorious, and sixteen of them belonged to the People's Democratic Party, which Mufti had floated in 1999. The Congress won only five seats in Kashmir but, having won several seats in the Jammu region, had a tally of twenty.

The only viable option was a coalition of the Congress and the People's Democratic Party. The question was: who would lead? Defying

the logic of numbers, Mufti made public the argument which Kashmir lived by: the valley was the centre of the world. Despite its smaller number, his party must lead the government since it had more seats from the valley, he argued. It did not matter that the Congress' nominee was an ethnic Kashmiri from Doda, just across the Pir Panjal. Migration from Kashmir had for centuries been like leaving paradise: one lost one's superiority over other beings.

So awed was India by Kashmir's histrionics by this time that the Congress accepted such utterly undemocratic logic and Mufti finally came to rule Kashmir. There was one change, however. For the first time, a minister from Jammu was designated deputy chief minister—at least in name. One of the other ministers, a Kashmiri of course, was far more powerful than he.

Abdullah's party took a terrible beating. Farooq had just a couple of months before those elections crowned his son, Omar, party president. He was to have succeeded Farooq as chief minister after the elections but could not even win his own seat. Kashmir thought of him as an outsider. Not only did he not speak the language, he had married a non-Kashmiri. More important, Kashmir blamed Farooq for the depredations of the Special Task Force, the cynical cruelties of which had destroyed lives, homes and families. Farooq had been oblivious to it. Cocooned in blankets of security, he had only realized the injustices of his regime when his driver had come crying to say that the Special Task Force had dragged his son away. Farooq had tried to rein them in after that, but it was too little, too late. Before Musharraf's coup, Farooq had had three years to win the hearts and minds of his people. Had their aspirations—for security, if not jobs—been satisfied then, they would have turned against the foreign jihad warriors that Pakistan was already sending. And, if that had happened by 1999, the interference could have ended as swiftly as it had in 1965.

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Since that opportunity had been missed, neither Farooq nor Mufti was in a position in the new century to counter Musharraf's strategies. Even mobilizing the Indian Army had only held him temporarily at bay. He would not let the Pakistan Army's investment in Kashmir's

insurgency be wasted without a resolution being negotiated between Pakistan and India.

After the assembly elections, the armies of India and Pakistan retreated from the border but the US, aided by the UK, had decided during the months when South Asia's nuclear powers had been in frontal confrontation to take things in hand. Promises had been elicited: from Pakistan, to let elections be held relatively peacefully, and from India, to engage after the elections in a dialogue with Pakistan to resolve the issue.

In the winter of 2002, however, the US was too preoccupied with garnering support for a second invasion of Iraq to push India to negotiate with Pakistan. It failed to get UN backing but invaded Iraq nevertheless in March 2003. So India was able to bide time until the US took Baghdad in the second week of April. Almost immediately after, however, pressure began to build: the pugnacious deputy secretary of state, Richard Armitage, announced that he would visit South Asia in the last week of that month.

In the third week of April, Vajpayee suddenly visited Srinagar and announced there that he was willing to revive talks with Pakistan. If Pakistan wanted, he said, he would send an officer of the external affairs ministry immediately. Vajpayee had not consulted his aides before making that offer—not even Brajesh Mishra. Perhaps he knew they would advise caution, but Vajpayee was single-minded about what he wanted—and he was not just pre-empting US pressure. If his steadfast search for peace was to continue, he had to engage Pakistan. He had desisted from war. The alternative presented by the Hurriyat had for the moment been snuffed out with Lone's assassination. (The Hurriyat was in the process of splitting, for Professor and Abbas Ansari had joined the mirwaiz in resisting Geelani's insistence that Lone's son Bilal be expelled for having covertly backed electoral participation.) And although Kashmir seemed quite happy with Mufti, the new chief minister was in no position to negotiate a long-term settlement—one that the secessionist leaders, leave alone the militants, might be expected to accept.

Pakistan's prime minister replied that he would talk to Vajpayee whenever and wherever Vajpayee wanted. Through the summer, Pakistan pressed in whichever way it could to try and force talks between the prime ministers, immediately, or at least between the

foreign ministers. But Vajpayee stood firm. This time, he would get involved only when officials had worked out the broad contours of an agreement.

While Vajpayee was determined on a slow and steady approach this time, one that would yield results, Pakistan knew it was running out of time. After 9/11, the West would make no distinction between a violent freedom struggle and terrorism. So, determined to make a deal while India remained under pressure, Pakistan resisted laborious negotiations between officials, hoping to push India into a decisive summit meeting. Violence in Kashmir increased sharply in August–September 2003, as if calculated to force the issue.

It was year-end before Pakistan became accommodative. Perhaps that had something to do with two attempts to assassinate Musharraf in December. The Frankenstein the ISI had created had turned its fire on Pakistan's president, possibly with the backing of a section of the ISI.

Pakistan was to host the next summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in early January 2004. In the week before the summit, Pakistan suddenly became more responsive to India than it had been since at least Nawaz Sharif's reception for Vajpayee at Lahore. The difference was that Nawaz Sharif had acted almost alone then. This time, much of Pakistan's elite was convinced that there was no option but to make friends with India—although a large portion of Pakistan's masses was dedicated to Osama Bin Laden's pan-Islamism.

It was a tenuous opportunity but that was when Vajpayee showed he was at least as great a visionary as Nehru. He snapped the discourse onto a plane far beyond the quarrel over Kashmir, a plane on which not only the territorial tussle between the two countries but also perhaps the struggle of the Kashmiris to protect and assert ethnic identity might get subsumed.

Vajpayee proposed his radical vision as a pithily simple idea: a South Asia with open borders and a single currency. Pakistan, which had for years resisted opening its markets to India, not only agreed to that idea for the long term, it committed itself to free trade within a couple of years. India agreed simultaneously to negotiate all the issues between them, including Kashmir.

Perhaps Pakistan's rulers only focussed on that promise, oblivious

to the implications of open borders and a single currency. The proposal envisaged an arrangement remarkably like the European Union. It would bind the two countries back into a sort of federal unity—only sovereignty would remain with each federated unit. It had a whiff of the Cabinet Mission Plan that Britain had proposed in 1946 as a way to keep India together. Looked at another way, it was a fresh road to the Akhand Bharat (Indivisible India) dream that the mentors of Vajpayee's party had cherished for decades. The difference was an inclusive spirit, a template that provided space for all to live in harmony rather than a monocultural, mono-religious template imposed across an entire territory. That was a shift for Vajpayee's party. And, were it to be followed through, it would have meant an even more radical shift in Pakistan policy, indeed its identity.

It was perhaps too much of a shift to expect. After Vajpayee lost office in elections four months after that breakthrough, the process gradually lost momentum. For a while, though, there were encouraging signs of change. One of the first things the two sides agreed in January 2004 was to allow people on either side of the Line of Control access to the other side. By the summer of 2005, official crossing points were re-established for the first time in more than fifty years. Open borders would make the tussle over the territory of the state largely redundant, although of course it would still leave the issue of sovereignty to be agreed.

Some of the Hurriyat leaders heard that in semi-official talks there had been mention of merging the sprawling stretches of Gilgit with Pakistan and Ladakh with India, leaving only the future of the populous south-western third of Hari Singh's state to be decided: Azad Kashmir on the one hand and Kashmir and the areas around Jammu on the other. The two sides tentatively discussed giving a large measure of autonomy to those areas, keeping sovereignty with each country on either side of the Line of Control. A joint sitting of the legislative assemblies was proposed, to give people on both sides a sense of being part of a reunited state.

Ironically, that could exacerbate the problem. For there was a vast difference between the autocratically ruled Jammu and Kashmir state that was divided in 1947 and one reunited in a democratic set-up. Kashmir had dominated Jammu and Ladakh on the Indian side

of the Line of Control. Representatives of Mirpur, a reunited Poonch and Muzaffarabad in a single assembly—together with Jammu, to which they remain much closer in culture and values—would decidedly tilt the balance against Kashmir. Once the political import of the new arrangement sank in, Kashmir's undiminished sense of superiority would surely react with a renewed sense of grievance.

Mirpuris have, over the last sixty years, taken to describing themselves as Kashmiri, but that has more to do with subtly resisting absorption into Pakistani Punjab than an affinity with the Kashmiri-speaking community. Were they to be placed in the same political space as Kashmiris, they would surely experience the sort of resentment that had surfaced when the National Conference first formed a working committee in 1939. However, any joint sittings of the assemblies on either side of the Line of Control were likely to be no more than symbolic. A large measure of autonomy (now called self-rule) was planned but India and Pakistan respectively were to retain sovereign control. Indeed, as if to seal its sovereignty over the valley of Kashmir, India pressed on—as artillery stopped booming on the Line of Control after a decade and a half—with constructing the daunting fence it had been trying to erect along the Line of Control.

Musharraf began to talk even more enthusiastically than Vajpayee of making borders irrelevant in the search for a solution that would satisfy India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir. However, by the time 2006 came round, he evidently became cynical about the progress of negotiations with India. That summer, militants targetted Indian tourists on the streets of Srinagar for the first time since violence had erupted seventeen years ago. It was not the only sign of a changed mood in the Pakistan Army, which was still very much in charge. Kashmiri boys who had lain low across the Line of Control since the two armies had massed along the borders in 2002 were sent back to Kashmir. And for the first time in those four years, fresh Kashmiri boys were recruited for training.

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Lung cancer, diagnosed a year before, killed Ali Sheikh on 4 December 2006. In his last days, he had dedicated himself to religion, even

bending in prayer on the way to the bathroom, and spending time at the site of Manigam's new mosque, raising funds and supervising construction. He had not been able to build the second storey of his own new concrete house, but the ground floor had six rooms, for his daughter, son-in-law, son and lone grandson, replete with faux *khatambandi* (stars carved into the blue-painted concrete ceiling). By this time, Kashmir was consuming concrete by the mega-ton: a dozen cement plants spewed pollution onto saffron fields, while energy consumption multiplied to cope with the heat and the cold that concrete let into homes. Old-style houses, like the one Ali Sheikh had recently replaced, were built with two-foot adobe walls that kept them cool in summer and warm in winter—and wood fires in their kitchens heated adjacent reservoirs of water. But Kashmir was as oblivious to the cost of environmental damage as to the dangerous waters into which the movement it had so enthusiastically supported after 1989 had drifted.

Talks between the two countries restarted in August 2006. The stakes were high this time. For, if they failed, the stage would be set for a fresh explosion of violence—perhaps even war.

The Hurriyat tried to do what it could in the winter of 2006–07 to end violence and strengthen moves for peace. It was led firmly by the mirwaiz now, Geelani having split in 2003. Pakistan had initially backed Geelani fully but, after thawing that year-end, had switched to the mirwaiz. Over the next couple of years, the latter's office virtually became Pakistan's consular office for Kashmiris: a letter from one of the mirwaiz's staff procured a visa.

Aftab was one of the most important of those office-bearers: spokesperson for the Hurriyat Conference and secretary to the chairman. At the beginning of 2007, he used his experience and contacts across the Line of Control to strategize politically. When the mirwaiz visited Pakistan in January 2007, Aftab persuaded him to play down Salahuddin's importance and raise the profile of other militant commanders. Mushtaq Zargar, the inner city lout who had commanded Al Umar and had been exchanged for hijacked passengers at Kandahar, had been well disposed towards Aftab since the early years of militancy.

That relationship had been cemented after Aftab's marriage into an inner city 'goat' family. So, after Aftab had done some groundwork over the telephone, Mirwaiz Umar spent four hours with Zargar, who put him in touch with the leading lights of the Harkat and the Lashkar.

Umar was amazed to find them backing his public calls for an end to bloodshed, to give peace talks a chance. It was a crucial time. India and Pakistan appeared close to agreeing on peripheral issues that would allow them to move ahead on the chief point of contention: Kashmir. Indeed, it seemed to Umar in February 2007 that India and Pakistan had never before been so close to agreement.

His optimism did not last, however. That he and his colleagues were echoing Musharraf's line—demilitarization and self-rule—made New Delhi uneasy. It did with Umar something very like what he had done with Salahuddin; it gave his rivals, such as Sajad Lone, as much importance as him and his colleagues. Aware of fresh infiltration in 2006 and 2007, New Delhi was particularly suspicious of Musharraf's focus on demilitarization. So much so that even Mufti was treated like a traitor when he echoed the idea. Umar and his colleagues could do little. They found they had no leverage when New Delhi gave them the cold shoulder. Their people barely responded to a strike call. Geelani and even Yasin had more credibility, if only for sticking to a position.

Kashmir was cynical about its leaders, but a bigger problem was inertia. Most ordinary Kashmiris wanted an end to bloodshed but few were willing to get involved in rooting out the foreign jihadis. The human rights abuses and extra-legal tactics—such as using Ikhwan mercenaries—had alienated common Kashmiris too much for them to cooperate with the Indian state and its agencies. Plus, as Omkar had pointed out to some of his captors when the Hizbullah had abducted the Wakhlus, Kashmir was reluctant to get involved and too often found entertainment in others' miseries—even in the spectacle of a horse sinking into a quagmire. Kashmir's nature had not changed in the hundreds of years since its king had ordered his capital torched for his nocturnal merriment.

Epilogue: Watching a Horse Drown

The idea Vajpayee proposed—open borders, single currency—is potentially visionary. Rapid technological innovations have since 1947 better equipped the world to synergize diverse talents across vast distances. Even during the years of Kashmir's rebellion, China became the world's manufacturer, and India brought jobs home from across the oceans. The elite in both Pakistan and India are eager to plug into the powerhouse of wealth that such potentially global synergies build. The unparalleled ethnic diversity of the subcontinent and its eclectic religions and cultures suit it for a world of complex economic processes. But the success of such a scheme hinges on positive human relations across communities. The religion-based animosity that divides the subcontinent, and the ethnic rivalry that yielded Bangladesh, has to be overcome. The key question in the first decade of the twenty-first century then is: can we live together in harmony so that we may best use the opportunities of unprecedented technologies?

It is a question not only for the subcontinent but of global salience. For, a global economic system requires a global civilization that includes rather than alienates—the sort of template that Gandhi and Nehru designed for India. At a time when national sovereignty has been compromised, it is not just a preferable arrangement. It is imperative.

Technology has since the 1970s made available to millions of people levels of wealth, knowledge, connectivity, lifestyles and aspirations that were beyond the reach of even aristocrats a century ago. Like Kashmir, much of the world lived in isolated agrarian communities then. Now that people are universally aware of previously undreamt of

opportunities, some communities seek to industrialize the way most of Europe did—by killing, expelling or forcibly converting peoples of other faiths, sects and ethnic roots. As in Kashmir around 1990, their movements are often expressed in nationalist terms. Early in the new century, global communication has allowed such exclusive templates to extend into global identity alignments. So, communities that feel left out of the dominant global system posit all those who subscribe to their identities as victims, and push them to resist.

When the US emerged—around the time Kashmir's insurgency began—as the world's sole superpower, it had the chance to fashion a new deal for the world. It could have led the way to an inclusive world that optimized the benefits of new technologies through an ethic of sharing. That of course would have required abnegation, more in the US than anywhere else. It opted instead for global dominance. Its special target: oil-rich West Asia.

Religion can be a powerful instrument to mobilize resistance, and Islam has become the banner of Arabs determined to free their lands of US dominance. Since the US controls totalitarian governments in their countries, they sought refuge in Pakistan—and Afghanistan, over which Pakistan had great influence in the 1990s. Finding Pakistan's founding template suitable, they stretched it beyond nationalism to make it the bedrock of a global Islamic identity that sought to overturn the world order that had developed since the Second World War. Since, at least until 2001, they operated under the aegis of the ISI, Kashmir was bound to be high on their agenda.

Having begun with an inclusive template, India should not only have been resistant to their movement, it could have become an example for the globalizing world. Instead, India has in the very process of globalizing regressed from the accommodation, even love, of others that Gandhi taught. It is a Catch-22: without Gandhian abnegation, the acquisitiveness that fires economic growth destroys the social harmony in which globalizing technologies yield optimal value. Although economic growth has taken the edge off the Hindu chauvinism that the Bharatiya Janata Party espoused in the early 1990s, a new round of acquisitiveness since the mid-1990s has led many among India's urban elite to erect barriers in their minds. They plug without question into the West's fears regarding Muslim

aspirations—their resentment getting a sharper edge owing to Muslim Pakistan's proxy war.

Antagonism against an Other is natural in any community that seeks more than it has, and postmodern aspirations tend to be limitless. But a postmodern set-up predicated on globalization is threatened by ethnic, sectarian or communal exclusivity. India's stability, for example, is threatened not only by the insurrection in Kashmir. As some of India's 160 million Muslims, marginalized by the economic boom, turn in frustration to the global monocultural template, India faces the prospect of the two-nation theory finally coming home to roost as a transnational concept.

Pakistan is the source of this threat in two ways: its evolving template and the machinations of the ISI. India can do little about the former. The latter it can best stymie by allaying Kashmir's misgivings regarding India's inclusiveness. After all, Kashmir is the prize for which those machinations are spun. Plus, if India can allay Kashmir's misgivings regarding Indian inclusiveness, the process would spin off among Muslims across the land.

The portents are depressing, though. India has drifted far from its founding template. Muslims have been systematically deprived of economic opportunities and forced into ghettos in the state of Gujarat. The task of national construction has degenerated from a visionary collective enterprise to a set of elite-driven projects with no care for the weakest citizens.

On the other hand, Kashmir has not, despite education and wealth, transcended its hateful contempt-ridden past. Religious, sectarian and ethnic antipathies continue. Even today, a Sunni might refuse to eat or drink—even a glass of water—in a Shia house he has to visit for work. Westernized graduates disparage each other's caste. And little community effort is made to ensure that Pandits feel secure about returning to stay in Kashmir.

Over five centuries of frequent chaos, exploitation and repression, the trust that any society requires—the willingness to set aside religious, sectarian, caste, ethnic or even personal interests for the collective good—is in tatters. Civil society bustles, but mistrust, so often evinced as ambivalence, constantly lurks. Kashmiris have deeply imbibed a consciousness of the illegitimacy of the state, its institutions and officers. Kashmiris feel they are right to blame the Indian state for

fraudulent elections and weak democracy, but New Delhi's machinations are only part of the story. Kashmiris are loathe to examine the roles of their leaders, the effects of their history and the state of their society. Democracy requires enough social trust for give and take, to accept winning and losing—and the dedication to conduct and participate in free and fair elections without having to import polling officers from elsewhere, as happened in 2002. Essentially, it requires taking responsibility. The unfortunate fact is that personal ambitions are foremost in the minds of many of Kashmir's leaders—but no more than among most of Kashmir's people.

At a collective level, Kashmir's insecurities about territorial and ethnic exclusivity do not allow it to suborn its separate identity for continental integration. Worse, many Kashmiris remain ambivalent about what identity they wish to protect: religious, ethnic, or multicultural. Too often, at both community and individual levels, protecting identity still involves little more than establishing supremacy. No wonder personal ambitions are foremost in the minds of many of Kashmir's leaders.

Their insistence on carrying all other parts of Hari Singh's kingdom along to their cherished if ambiguous dream of freedom reflects insensitivity to other peoples' aspirations. It bespeaks Kashmir's need to validate itself through domination. At root, Kashmir still experiences insecurity as superiority—the sense of being Saraswat Brahmin, as Professor put it. This has, since the National Conference first appointed a working committee in 1939, led it to dominate the rest of Hari Singh's kingdom and later to squeeze as much as possible out of both India and Pakistan—with no sense of reciprocal responsibility.

To some extent, the attitude of Kashmiri Muslims of the valley towards their neighbours mirrors that of US neo-conservatives towards the rest of the world—except that the latter have a plan. They also have an easier field of play, since Kashmir is not a superpower and is constrained by the rival ownership claims of two powerful countries. Plus, Kashmir's natural ambivalence and dissembling allows others to overtake its own agenda. As Pakistan-based groups took over its insurgency for more than a decade, Kashmiris have generally been too preoccupied to notice that Kashmir has become an ideological battlefield, a quagmire in which those who see it as a front in the

war for resurgent Islam to dominate the world are pitted against those who battle India's suzerainty. Although ideologues like Geelani have been isolated even by the mainstream of the Jamaat, many of his rivals among Kashmir's leaders remain woolly headed about what they want. Most of Kashmir is metaphorically doing what Omkar Wakhlu described to his Hizbullah abductors: watching a horse drown without getting involved. Fickle ambivalence leaves Kashmir open to remaining willy-nilly a major front for global jihad—as well as the cutting edge of religious and ethnic antagonism within South Asia.

Worse, since it was wrenched out of the abysmal poverty of a feudal, agrarian economy before the rest of the subcontinent, Kashmir has struggled longer to fit into the dizzyingly fast-paced processes of globalization. Its frustrations have had that much more time to coalesce. So the resultant volatility, and communal and sectarian cruelty, that it has witnessed might be a foretaste of what could happen elsewhere. After all, the battle between merit and reservation reached the Indian heartland six decades after it was sparked in Kashmir. And, although Sunni–Shia bitterness has a longer history in Kashmir, aspirations have been so much more acutely frustrated in Pakistan that sectarian hatred has already been more violently manifest there than in Kashmir.

Despite these depressing possibilities, if there is hope that Kashmir could be the cornerstone of an integrated South Asia—which in turn could be an exemplar for the world—it lies, ironically, in the generation that has grown up during the insurgency. Despite the crass abuse they have witnessed, many of those who were children at the turn of the twenty-first century are bullish. They want to tap into the global economy to win wealth, fame, happiness and security.

Even the inspiring leadership of Abdullah and Bakshi failed to make Kashmir a disciplined industrial powerhouse but, strange as it may seem, the experience of militancy has to some extent empowered. The brutalization of Kashmiris from both sides has forced the youth to assert their rights with a measure of dignity, absorbing in the heat of violence some humanist values. Success at protesting corruption, nepotism and the inhuman repression of the Special Task Force by unseating Farooq Abdullah through the ballot box has taught young Kashmiris the value of standing up for rights instead of dissembling individually for limited gain while acquiescing in the manipulative

tactics through which rulers repress. For the first time in history, Kashmir has learnt the Renaissance value that moulded several European nations: citizens' collective insistence on keeping a rein on their rulers.

The direct interaction with the world beyond Kashmir's mountain walls that the rebellion provided—both across the Line of Control and in different parts of India—has also given young Kashmiris confidence to interact on equal terms with their rulers and the outside world. It has dragged Kashmir out of its eternal self-absorption, the attitude that Kashmir is the centre of the world, that the sun sets in Gulmarg.

Whatever agreement on Kashmir India and Pakistan reach will only be an administrative framework, but it will open political opportunities. Kashmir faces three choices: it could remain part of the war of puritans trying to dominate the globe; it could remain the cutting edge of South Asia's possible Balkanization; or it could become the pivot of a new model of inter-community accommodation on equal terms, in Kashmir and in the subcontinent, one that might be an example for the world. Whether or not young Kashmiris use these opportunities and ensuing empowerment to design a harmonious world is a question that only their actions will answer.

Notes

Chapter 1: Paradise Stressed

For many of the facts and my analysis in this chapter, I am indebted to R.L. Hangloo's *The State in Medieval Kashmir* (he cites Suka Pandit and Prajayabhata's *Rajvalipatika* on the price of paddy in 1534), U.K. Zutshi's *Emergence of Political Awakening in Kashmir* and my conversations with Sofi Mohiuddin, Pran Nath Jalali, an octogenarian with amazing intellect and memory.

Chapter 2: Eruption

The current keeper of the Dastgir Sahib shrine and his relatives showed me the Round Room and shared with me family lore regarding the meeting that was held there in March 1931. Abdullah's biographer, Yusuf Teng, and Sofi Mohiuddin, Masoodi's secretary for several decades, added details garnered from what Abdullah and Masoodi respectively had told them.

Yusuf Teng, Agha Ashraf Ali, Anwar Asahi and Sofi Mohiuddin are among those who told me of Abdullah's activities during the Reading Room Party days, including his interactions with Agha Syed Hasan (Agha Ashraf's uncle) and Wakefield.

Idrees Kanth, who is engaged in doctoral research on the period around 1931 at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, told me that the content of memoranda and telegrams from Kashmir's Muslims increasingly focussed on oppression by Hindus in the period leading up to 1931. I am grateful to him for the text of the telegram from the Government of British India to the resident. Sofi Mohiuddin told me how Masoodi spotted Bakshi pasting posters in 1931.

I found Oliver St John's report to the viceroy on his conversation with Maharaja Pratap Singh in Prem Nath Bazaz's book *Inside Kashmir*. I am grateful to Mushtaq Sagar for putting me in touch with an ageing former activist of the pre-partition Muslim Conference, who very kindly lent me his copy of the 1941 publication.

Chapter 3: Political Churning

I am grateful to Dr Arshad Alam of Jamia Millia Islamia for a sociological analysis of Deoband's origin.

In recounting Abdullah's secular pronouncements, I have quoted from books that recount that version, since those who I interviewed, including Pandits such as Manmohan Wazir (born 1926), corroborated with their personal experiences Abdullah's staunch defence of Pandits as a group, and inclusive attitude towards individual Pandits. I have therefore neglected research based on government intelligence reports, which paint him as communal.

Sofi Mohiuddin recounted to me the incident at the party office that demonstrates the differences in style between Bakshi and Sadiq and the battle on Hari Singh High Street.

Chapter 4: Ambivalence

Jinnah's description of the National Conference reception as 'royal' was related to me by Agha Ashraf Ali, who was present at the lunch. Agha Shaukat, the host, was his eldest brother.

Yusuf Teng told me of Abdullah's visits to Ishbury, which is next to Nishat garden, and that Abdullah eavesdropped on Jinnah's Muslim Park speech. Abdullah told Teng these facts.

Karri Saifuddin, Saduddin's brother-in-law, recounted to me in 2002 their 1945 visit to Dar-ul-Islam. I also spoke to Ghulam Ahmed Ahrar, the third Kashmiri there.

Chapter 5: Devious Manoeuvres

Mir Qasim told me in 1999 what Sadiq had recounted to him of his conversation with Abdullah in a shikara in 1946.

Sofi Mohiuddin described to me Mohammed Sultan Galdar, the party's town-crier, and how he advertised the Quit Kashmir agitation.

Former MP Abdul Rashid Kabuli told me that, while Sadiq was chief minister, he described 'Quit Kashmir' as illegal in a conversation with Kabuli, who was then a student leader.

Yusuf Teng told me that Faiz told him during an interview for Radio Kashmir of his efforts to arrange meetings for Sadiq and Bakshi.

Agha Ashraf, Agha Shaukat's brother, told me that Jinnah spoke of Kashmir as 'a ripe fruit'.

Sofi Mohiuddin told me what happened at Pratap Park after Masoodi's release. He also recounted the exchange between Bakshi and Abdullah at Bakshi's brother's house.

Chapter 6: Partition

Agha Ashraf, who was sitting at a café in Lal Chowk on 27 October 1947, described the scene in town that day and how Bakshi tried to find a driver in Maisuma.

Anwar Asahi, the son of Ghulam Ahmed Asahi, told me of the conversation between Asahi, Abdullah and Colonel Adalat Khan.

I have gone by Brigadier (later Lieutenant General) L.P. Sen's date for the battle of Srinagar rather than Major (later Major General) Akbar Khan's. Sen was reporting to a regular chain of command. Khan was covertly leading a mercenary force and could possibly have been more easily confused about the date.

Sofi Mohiuddin told me Sheerwani had been trying out his new motorcycle. They had met when Sheerwani rode through Sofi's village at Ganderbal en route to Shalteng via Sumbal.

Agha Ashraf told me of the scenes at the airport, including Sardar Patel's comment. Agha was trying to return to his teaching job at Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi.

Mir Qasim told me Abdullah instructed him to arrange tongas to take Pandits to Jammu.

Ved Bhasin told me of Chet Ram Chopra's warning to him and of training with .303s.

I am indebted to C. Dasgupta's research, published in *War and Diplomacy in Kashmir, 1947–48*, for much of the last section of this chapter.

Senior police officer Javaid Makhdoomi told me of the Pandit conversion in Delina village.

Chapter 7: Geopolitics

Sofi Mohiuddin told me that Ali Shah Geelani approached Abdullah after a public meeting at Sopore and how Masoodi mentored him. Geelani confirmed and told me more about it.

As Masoodi's assistant at the constituent assembly, Sofi watched Abdullah speak to Ayyangar.

Mir Qasim, who was a member of Abdullah's delegation, described the exchanges at the New Delhi talks.

Sofi Mohiuddin told me of the meeting in Sonamarg and Nehru's comment about handing Kashmir to Pakistan on a platter. Mir Qasim told me what Nehru said when Abdullah interrupted the meeting for prayers.

Sofi Mohiuddin and Manmohan Wazir (a junior police officer at the time who retired with the rank of director general of police) told me of the party outside Maulana Azad's cottage at Chashma Shahi.

Retired inspector general of police, L.D. Thakur, who was a superintendent of police when he arrested Sheikh Abdullah, recounted the event to me. Although he was nonaganerian when I met him, he was lucid. He walked me to his gate after the interview.

Chapter 8: Development

Mir Qasim described to me how, in his presence, a glass dropped from Bakshi's hand.

M.V. Krishnappa, deputy food minister and Kidwai's junior, was my father's closest friend (they were in jail together during the Quit India agitation) and recounted the exchange between Nehru and Kidwai to my father.

Sheikh Abdul Qayoom, whose father was a police officer, told me of Nehru's anger over toilet paper at the Tara Niwas palace.

Sofi Mohiuddin told me Colonel Adalat Khan turned a blind eye to Mrs Abdullah carrying messages in and out of jail.

M.L. Fotedar told me of Tariq Abdullah's interruption when Nehru's emissary visited Mrs Abdullah. Fotedar had escorted the emissary—whom he refused to name.

Professor Omkar Wakhlu, who was principal of Srinagar's Regional Engineering College in the mid-1980s, told me how Bakshi forced Humayun Kabir to set it up in Srinagar.

Mir Qasim told me what Nehru told him when Bakshi re-arrested Abdullah. ('I don't like anything Bakshi does.')

M.L. Fotedar, who was present, described to me the meeting at which the Kamaraj Plan was adopted. (S.K. Patil remarked that Bakshi was not even a Congress member. Pratap Singh Kairon, who was also about to lose his job as chief minister of Punjab, suggested that he could become a member by paying twenty-five paise.)

Chapter 9: Heavy Weapons

Ghulam Mohammed Butt, one of Mirwaiz Farooq's three friends who joined him in his hamam on the morning the relic disappeared, is among those who recounted these events to me.

Sofi Mohiuddin told me of the visits to Masoodi's residence. Farooq Abdullah confirmed that he carried Masoodi to the jeep.

Butt told me he overheard Sadiq talking to Nehru from Ghulam Mohammed Bhat Reda's house by the river.

I have surmised Nehru's reasons for backing Abdullah's visit to Pakistan from his statement in early May 1964, to the All India Congress Committee (Karan Singh, former sadr-e-riyasat and senior Congress leader, quoted it verbatim in his *Autobiography*):

> Sheikh Abdullah is wedded to the principles of secularism and does not want anything to be done to vitiate these in any way. He does not believe in the two-nation theory, which was the basis of formation of Pakistan. Nevertheless, he hopes that it should be possible for India, holding on to her principles, to live in peace and friendship with Pakistan and thus incidentally to put an end to the question of Kashmir. I cannot say if we shall succeed in this, but it is clear that unless we succeed India will carry the burden of a continuing conflict with Pakistan with all that this implies. I hope Pakistan will get rid of its hatred and fear of India. She has nothing to fear from India, unless she herself attacks India. I hope that it may be possible for the two countries to develop closer and more intimate relations to the advantage of both. If Sheikh Abdullah can help in bringing this about, he will have done a great service to both the countries. We are prepared to help him in this attempt but, in doing so, we must adhere to our principles as well as our basic attitude in regard to Kashmir.

Chuni Lal Bhat gave me a detailed account of what happened at Haripora and Manigam when Pakistanis infiltrated in 1965. I have interpolated Ali Sheikh at the beginning of that story in order to provide a narrative link.

Sofi Mohiuddin, still Masoodi's shadow, was present at Sadiq's lunch for the visitors. Rajpuri, who was by then the assembly speaker, told me that he had heard of the meeting.

Chapter 10: Effervescence

Manmohan Wazir, who investigated the case in 1967, told me what Parmeshwari Devi, the Pandit girl who married a Muslim, did in court.

Kashmir Times publisher Ved Bhasin described what happened in the hours before Abdullah was elected leader by the Congress. As a Congress activist, he was among those who overwrote the title of Abdullah's speech. Mir Qasim confirmed it, and told me what happened at the induction ceremony.

Sofi told me that, in his presence, Desai told Masoodi the party wanted him to be chief minister. According to Sofi, Masoodi bit his tongue and said they had to ensure that Abdullah became chief minister. According to Sofi, Masoodi then suggested that Desai consult Indira Gandhi, which he did. Iftekhar Ansari, who had contested the Parliament elections against Mrs Abdullah a few months earlier, had now joined the Janata Party. He told me that he too heard that Desai consulted his long-time opponent, Indira.

Wajahat Habibullah, who is now Chief Information Commissioner for India, was among the officers Desai addressed on how elections should be conducted. He told me what both deputy prime ministers and the prime minister instructed.

Chapter 11: Blinkered Politics

Manmohan Wazir, who became a member of the State Public Service Commission later in the 1980s, told me about the unwritten norms. Regarding nepotism, he related the incident when Mrs Abdullah telephoned while the candidate she was recommending was being interviewed.

T.N. Ganjoo, a Pandit lecturer, told me he witnessed the naked taunts in Iqbal Park. Senior police officers confirmed it.

Farooq Abdullah told me the Congress had suggested to Pyare Lal Handoo that the National Conference leave ten valley seats for it.

Vijay Dhar told me Mrs Gandhi asked him a few months before Abdullah died to persuade Abdullah to renew their parties' alliance and that Abdullah asked if she wanted him or the Kashmiri people to be with India. Vijay Dhar also told me of the attempt by A.N. Haksar and B.K. Nehru, along with him, to intercede with Mrs Gandhi before Farooq Abdullah's government was brought down.

Wajahat Habibullah, who was a joint secretary in Indira Gandhi's secretariat, told me Mrs Gandhi asked his mother, who was a Congress MP, to forge a fresh link between the Congress and the National Conference before the 1980 elections, and about Farooq Abdullah's attempt to patch up with her in Ladakh in mid-1984. He heard her say that you don't take risks with Kashmir.

I interviewed Mushtaq Ahmed Bhat a.k.a. Guga while he waited in shackles outside the district court in Srinagar for a hearing. He agreed after some thought to a brief interview but sent a message asking me to return for another interview at his next hearing. I was struck by the radiance that his commitment to his pan-Islamic cause gave his face—and by the fact that, even in jail, he knew what was happening in places like Lebanon.

Ishfaq Majid's father and Guga were among those who told me of Tahiri's and Maulvi Mutheruddin's role at the Iqra masjid in shaping the incipient insurgents.

Hilal War gave me some of these facts, including Yusuf Shah's slogan '*Zal-zala hai . . .*' from atop a bus.

Chapter 12: Islamic Mobilization

Veerana Aivalli (a Kannadiga from the Jammu and Kashmir police cadre), who was India's director general of civil aviation security when he died, told me that Muslim–Hindu social interaction had decreased in the 1980s, that saris became less common and that girls at Melhanson school, where his wife was a teacher, had begun more commonly to wear head scarves.

Abdul Ghani Bhat and Abbas Ansari gave me detailed accounts of the Muslim United Front. I confirmed their accounts with Ali Shah Geelani and G.M. Bhat. Abdul Ghani Lone, Bilal Lodhi and Hilal War gave me some facts.

G.K. Arora, who was joint secretary in Rajiv Gandhi's office, told me that M.J. Akbar, Vijay Dhar and Nusli Wadia helped to persuade Farooq Abdullah to ally his party with the Congress.

Chapter 13: Proxy War

M.K. Rasgotra recounted to me his negotiations with Niaz Naik.

Chapter 14: To Arms

The incident in which Hamid Sheikh was shot after grabbing a policeman's gun was related to me by an eyewitness who was a schoolboy at the time.

Chapter 15: One Woman's Rights

I deeply appreciate the trust with which Rubaiya Sayeed permitted me to check with her the detailed account of her abduction that I got from Saleem 'Nanhaji'.

Moosa Raza, Farooq Abdullah, B.G. Deshmukh, George Fernandes, Ishfaq's father, and Iqbal Gandroo, told me of negotiations for Rubaiya Sayeed's release. A.S. Dulat and Iftekhar Ansari added information and V.P. Singh confirmed the overall story.

I tried to check Abdullah's version of the discussion in his hamam with I.K. Gujral, but was told by his staff that, as a former prime minister, he did not accept interview requests over the telephone. Since I had no office, I was unable to send him an adequate written application. (I deeply appreciate that V.P. Singh promptly came to the phone and offered me time slot options to suit my convenience, and that Mr Khandekar immediately fixed time for me to meet P.V. Narasimha Rao without even checking with him.)

Iftekhar Ansari told me of Farooq Abdullah's calls from the cabinet meeting. Abdullah and George Fernandes confirmed it. V.P. Singh told me he passed on the misgivings about Jagmohan to Mufti. Krishna Rao, Farooq Abdullah and Moosa Raza told me how Abdullah resigned. Ved Bhasin added information about the lobbying in Delhi, including the dinner at Mufti's house for the communist and others.

J.N. Saxena, who was director general of police, told me how he ordered the Chota Bazar cordon-and-search operation and that neither Farooq Abdullah nor Jagmohan knew of it. At Chota Bazar, I interviewed some of those who were picked up that night.

Javed Mir told me how the procession gathered behind him en route to Gowkadal. One of the survivors, some residents of the area and some Jammu and Kashmir police officers told me what happened there.

M.A. Zaki told me of his part, including Jagmohan's request that he take charge.

Chapter 16: Discovering Jihad

Aftab and Javed Mir used the same words to describe their shock at first seeing Muzaffarabad. Both compared it to Ramban.

I was denied a Pakistani visa for research. I wanted to check and add to what Aftab, Azam Inquilabi, Ahad Waza, Syed Firdous, Javed Mir and several other Kashmiris told me—and to better understand Pakistani positions.

My brief stay in Lahore when I went as a reporter to cover Atal Behari Vajpayee's bus journey in 1999 gave me a glimpse of their heartfelt warmth and how deeply Pakistanis believe that Kashmir legitimately belongs in their country. I also realized how versions regarding what happened in Jammu and Kashmir before and during partition, the influence of the Muslim Conference and National Conference respectively, and the roles of leaders including Nehru and Abdullah differ radically in each country—and so contribute to an image of the other as illegitimate aggressor.

In the late 1990s, the late Eqbal Ahmed had very kindly invited me to stay at his research centre in Lahore as long as I liked. After interviewing me for an hour and a half in early 2002, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Pakistan's high commissioner to India at the time, had graciously agreed to recommend my visa application, but added that the decision would be taken higher up.

I am grateful to Frédéric Grare for access to his research material on Pakistan at the French Cultural Centre in New Delhi, and to Anne Chatterjee for putting me in touch with him.

Chapter 17: Pakistan Takes Over

I saw Ali Sheikh's house when I interviewed him there. He told me of the altercation with his son after the latter clenched a fist at a brigadier.

I was in Kashmir in the last week of February 1990 and saw the turnout when people were called to Tsrar. My vehicle took several hours to travel less than 2 kilometres through the multitude—from Pratap Park to the Iqra mosque. Ishfaq's father told me of his son's reaction.

Hakim Ghulam Nabi told me of his visit to Kathmandu and that he did not know at the time that Geelani too had been there. Geelani acknowledged to me that he had been there—adding wryly that I was asking him the same questions they had asked when he was interrogated—but said he had had no meetings there.

Ishfaq's father, Iqbal Gandroo and other JKLF activists told me how Ishfaq died.

Chapter 18: Murder Most Foul

Wajahat Habibullah, Veerana Aivalli and a family of Pandits that continued to live in a village in the far south of the valley told me of the killing of Pandits in Anantnag district. I am grateful for the day I spent with that family. Statistics are from Jammu and Kashmir police records.

Ishfaq's father told me of angry phone calls from across the Line of Control regarding Justice Butt's killing.

Chapter 19: Colossal Bungling

Scenes between the MPs and Jagmohan were recounted to me by a senior police officer who was present. George Fernandes and Iftekhar Ansari are among those who confirmed it to me. I am grateful to George Fernandes for the couple of hours he gave me for this interview at the end of a long day as defence minister.

B.G. Deshmukh, who was then principal secretary to the prime minister, told me what happened the day Jagmohan dissolved the Jammu and Kashmir assembly. V.P. Singh confirmed it.

The mirwaiz's secretary, Syed ur Rehman Shams, told me of the letters Mirwaiz Farooq wrote to Pakistani leaders and that he went to Delhi to hand them to the Pakistani ambassador. Shams also described to me Mirwaiz Farooq's son Umar running to tell his father that Doordarshan director Lasa Kaul had been killed.

Shams told me what happened on the day the mirwaiz was assassinated. Senior Jammu and Kashmir officials and police officers of the time told me of the security disaster that day. Hospital staff and a number of mirwaiz fans, including Mirwaiz Farooq's brother-in-law—who was assassinated in 2006—described the scenes at the hospital and in the procession to me.

Chapter 20: Dissipation

Majid Dar and Imran Rahi, each at different times deputy chief commander of the Hizb-ul Mujahideen, told or confirmed to me parts of the Hizb story. Zubair-ul Islam, who had been the group's divisional commander for north Kashmir, gave me many facts, as did several other former militants, particularly Babar Badr, Saleem Nanhaji and Iqbal Gandroo.

Shabir Zargar gave me a detailed account of Al Umar's formation.

Mama Sadpuri gave me a detailed account of his abduction, torture and the war between Al Umar and the Hizb.

Azam Inquilabi told me of the three ISI officers—Asad, Zubair and Numan—turning up to meet him with the draft constitution when the United Jihad Council was formed.

Chapter 21: Guerrilla Hero

This chapter is based on detailed interviews with Aftab and Azam Inquilabi. Tariq Kashmiri and a senior Kashmiri journalist who was then in Muzaffarabad confirmed what happened when Azam Inquilabi led a march back. J.N. Dixit, who was then India's high commissioner in Pakistan, told me the government was convinced it was a Pakistani stunt and that Indian soldiers had been ordered to shoot at the marchers.

I interviewed Aftab's father's friend and his family in Jammu about Aftab's stay with them.

I interviewed Nanhaji and Javed Mir about the latter's return to the valley.

General Naseeb Katoch gave me detailed accounts of Babar Badr's and Guga's arrests. I confirmed with both of them.

I interviewed Omkar and Khemlata Wakhlu about their abduction and read their book on it for more details.

Zubair-ul Islam, divisional commander of the Hizb-ul Mujahideen for north Kashmir, told me of the fight that erupted between Hizb boys under his command and the Pakistani group from Dawat-ul-Irshad.

Chapter 22: Running Amok

Hamid Sheikh's father told me that the false identity card found on his body described him as a doctor.

Chapter 23: Templates Under Stress

Zubair-ul Islam, who organized the meeting of top leaders of the Jamaat and the Hizb at Behrampura, told me about it.

T.N. Ganjoo told me what happened to the Pandit bus driver's family and H.N. Wanchoo, and about the census in 1992. Kumar Wanchoo told me how his father was abducted and found killed.

Chapter 25: A Losing Battle

I have been forced to go by Aftab's accounts of what happened to him, and the little I could corroborate in the valley. Had I been given a visa for research in Pakistan, and in Muzaffarabad and Mirpur, I could have sought the versions of persons such as Abdul Qayoom Khan and his son Attique.

Chapter 26: Elections

Abdullah Tari gave me detailed accounts of Shabir Shah's meeting with Vajpayee, at which Tari was present.

A senior state police officer told me fish from the state fish breeding farms were poured into the stream in Dachigam before Ambassador Wisner went fishing.

Farooq Abdullah told me of his interactions with Narasimha Rao, his ministers and Dulat. Narasimha Rao confirmed it in broad terms.

As a reporter, I witnessed Farooq Abdullah's campaign speech in Anantnag. I had also witnessed Qazi Nisar's funeral and the change in public opinion regarding Pakistan and India that day.

When I toured rural Kashmir in the summer of 1995, several Kashmiris told me, sotto voce in the privacy of their homes, that they felt crushed between both sorts of gun-wielding men and wanted elections. Many referred to the peace that had returned to Punjab since the 1992 elections there. But they added, almost uniformly, that they wanted the army to force them to the booths, so that they would have an excuse for having voted if Hizb or Jamaat activists sought retribution.

Chapter 28: Wasted Opportunities

P. Chidambaram told me that Nawaz Sharif's attitude changed after an army officer whispered in his ear.

Majid Dar told me what Lieutenant General Aziz told him, and of the conversation between him, Salahuddin, Lieutenant General Mehmood and Lieutenant General Jeelani, and of his interactions with Hurriyat leaders when he arrived in the valley to offer a ceasefire.

Chapter 29: Nine Eleven

In 1976, during the Emergency, the Constitution of India had been amended to extend the term of Parliament and all state assemblies to six years. The Jammu and Kashmir assembly did not follow suit—as necessary under Article 370—when the term of Parliament and state assemblies reverted to five years after the Emergency.

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